

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH CDR KIRK LIPPOLD, 22 DECEMBER 2000

On 22 December, 2000, Commander Kirk Lippold, Commanding Officer, USS COLE met with four members of the CINCLANTFLT JAGMAN review team to discuss Force Protection on board USS COLE at the time of the terrorist attack. Those present with CDR Lippold were CAPT Joe Krenznel, USN (CLF N357X); CAPT Larry McCullough, JAGC, USN (CLF Fleet Judge Advocate); CDR Max Jenkins, JAGC, USN (2nd Fleet, Fleet Judge Advocate); and CDR Steve Rodgers, JAGC, USN (CLF, Deputy Fleet Judge Advocate). The CO's comments are summarized below:

Training in Force Protection prior to entering 5th Fleet:

COLE participated in a Second Fleet Anti-Terrorism/Force Protection (AT/FP) exercise prior to JTFEX. C2F briefed the crew and, subsequently, the crew was in a much-heightened state of alert for the exercise. The crew knew that Force Protection was part of the exercise and that the boundary would be at pier two. We took forward-leaning measures. We used water barriers and stopped contractors, which angered the base. The crew knew that the Beirut bombing truck was custom built - we were focused. I was a trusted agent so I couldn't let on to the crew and I observed them do it right, the first time. C2F singled out COLE in a BZ message for her efforts. We had the same Force Protection Officer and Assistant Force Protection Officer during that exercise that we had in Yemen. I felt great about those guys. Everyone had been to Level One Anti-Terrorist/Force Protection training. I had been to level III. That was the first Force Protection exercise I know of in LANTFLT. It was a step in the right direction but we were definitely taking small steps before trying to run with it. We were not flexed using fire hoses nor did we practice using picket boats. We concentrated on pierside threats and had little or no discussion or training in water-borne threats.

There were no Force Protection training exercise scenarios in the wardroom. ROE practice was for underway or for meeting inbound aircraft (like a loaded Cessna). We never practiced foreign pierside force protection. In some ways the force protection training exercise is more for the "staff." The ship often sits like a pawn. We were tasked to complete intrusion drills, both against us and our people running drills against other ships. The perceived threat was that someone would try to get on the ship, all the while Intel messages built up to let you know something was coming. In Yemen there was no heightened level of Intel warning messages.

On ROE:

We understood our ROE in this foreign port to be only one thing: self-defense.

On Yemen:

We knew we had to get in there to keep the requisite number of tomahawk missiles in theater. We were originally going to relieve USS COOK in the Red Sea but the Serbia-Montenegro elections made presence more necessary in 6th fleet. We were moving in and out because of the Adriatic business. We had to make 25 knots just to get in by the afternoon of 8 October.

With Yemen there was very little scheduling information passed ahead of time. We knew we were going to Aden about two weeks prior. We weren't even sure what - if any - pier we were heading to. Schedule just said BSF. In 6th Fleet there is a lot more information provided up front - - when and where you are going; points of contact; husbanding agents, all of it.

With Yemen - there was virtually no direction; no pier; only BSF and some LOGREQ messages. This was why we couldn't tailor our force protection plan before we arrived - we didn't really know where we were going. We knew the threat condition in Yemen was High to Significant. I remember it specifically - got a message from [redacted] on the 11th and Weps (Weapons Officer, [redacted]) - this threat message has no real value added - there was nothing to tie to it. It was a new theater and a new place and we wanted to be alert. That the THREATCON might be "significant" as opposed to "high" was not a factor in deciding which force protection measures to implement.

How long would we be in Aden? We'd heard it was painfully long to get fuel there. We estimated 6 to 8 hours to get the fuel. We were at 50%. Once fueling started, we were surprised that the fuel was coming so quickly. We were getting 2500 gallons a minute. We had to back them off to 2000 gallons a minute.

Where to tie up:

We knew it "might" be a dolphin but weren't sure. We didn't want to point up into the harbor. I wanted the starboard side to so I could point OUT of the harbor. I didn't want to waste time twisting in the basin if we needed to get out of there.

The pilot resisted because it would take less time to tie us up port side to - he would not have had to twist the ship going in. He is paid the same money no matter how long it takes. If there

was a lot of traffic in that harbor we weren't going to be in a posture to get out fast.

For Force Protection, we waited until we were alongside the dolphin to re-assess what we need to do.

Regarding picket boats:

We talked it out. We were focused on training and getting it done. That morning and on the bridge we discussed picket boats (it was primarily me and Weps). You weigh the factors:

- Length of time in port
- The THREATCON
- The area conditions
- The fifteen minute alert for picket boats
- What you see when you get there

If I put a boat in the water that meant dealing with a boat crew for the day - taking those people off other positions where they were also needed. Weighing what a RHIB could do against putting the ship in such a posture (starboard) so it could escape the harbor - mooring starboard side to and being able to get underway rapidly was a "better" force protection tactic. Putting the ship in on the starboard side meant the crane for the RHIBs was blocked. We talked about it. It was the right thing to do.

If I had gone with picket boats I would have directed them to question any boat that made a perpendicular approach to the ship. We never had trained (or been directed to train) using small boats in this way. We were never told it was OK to put the boats in the water. We understood that a prior ship had considered putting pickets in the water and the Yemenis had strenuously objected.

What threat made me think it important to point out of the harbor? I don't know exactly. There was no Intel to indicate a threat against us that day. I just had a feeling that in a new harbor (neither the XO the OOD or I had pulled into Yemen before - we had no Arabic linguist on board) that I should be ready for a fast pull out if anything should happen. Pointing out meant we could simply chop our lines; not have to stop and retrieve small boats or crews from the water; there would be no brow to pick up - and very important, we could avoid the full twist in the middle of the harbor and get out.

Regarding fire hoses:

The firehoses would have laid on the deck, not visible to approaching boats or those working on the fuel dolphin. The hoses were an inch and a half and we believed only effective to deter people from climbing the brow. We had no brow (because of the fuel dolphin) so the hose measures were not considered necessary or effective. The ship was never trained/exercised in using the fire hoses to dissuade approaching craft. There were no understood criteria for putting a hose into action. This was common sense. Never practiced hoses on vessels - only on a brow and we did not have the brow rigged. The ship was expecting three garbage boats. Two had been and gone before the suicide vessel approached amidships - this is one of the areas where garbage is brought up on the COLE (the compressed plastic disks). None of the approaching vessels gave off indications of hostile intent so no one would have trained a hose on them even if the hoses had been connected.

On moving the watch from the bridge to the quarterdeck:

We weren't pierside and we weren't launching any liberty boats. By putting the watch on the deck it put the people in charge closer to the actual business at hand. They were closer to the top side rovers. They had better line of sight to the people working the dolphin. They had more direct access to the husbanding agent. If I needed them back up on the bridge a simple LMC announcement would have had them back up there. On the quarterdeck, the watch can reach people visually and even verbally - better in this situation. It put them within voice range of the fueling dolphin.

Thoughts to port security:

Never told that we would have absolutely no Yemeni security - did not realize there were no assets there to support us.

Normally all the arrangements are made after you pull in and meet with the husbanding agent. The LOGREQs handled by an 05 or DAO Army representative are hit and miss. Other than knowing the stop at Aden - there was no better data about where and when we would tie up. There was an NCIS threat assessment from October 98 and we had that one.

On waiving Force Protection Measures:

I don't know of any specific guidance to waive force protection measures. I know you can't tell which measures are going to be applicable until you get to the harbor, put "eyes on" and see where you are going to tie up. The measures concerning ship visits and liberty boats were clearly inapplicable here. Having the ship point out of the harbor vice having a RHIB float nearby for perhaps 8 hours - was the right thing to do. These were measures that COLE was suggesting, from the ship up the chain of command. These were not measures custom crafted and dictated by 5th fleet for our particular BSF. If the measures had come from 5th Fleet down - we would never have deviated without first obtaining permission. I understood the plan to be COLE's and based on what we observed as we pulled in - we needed to fine tune that plan to be in the most effective posture. I get paid to be the Commanding Officer. I get paid to make the right decisions. I would have informed 5th Fleet of all the measures COLE found necessary in the daily OPREP (OPREP FIVE). Again - this was a COLE generated Force Protection Plan - modified on location as necessary. We discussed every single measure we implemented and every single measure we did not implement.

I never delegated the ability to waive or implement force protection measures to the Force Protection Officer or the Assistant Force Protection Officer. They were my trained action officers. I was impressed with their performance and comfortable with them in their assignments. I was always informed of the intended Force Protection measures and, as Commanding Officer, would have signed off on any plan before it was implemented. These were my action officers and I relied on them - I did not delegate my authority to them. The relationship with the Force Protection officers was completely consistent with that. Supervisor and supervised. They would propose a plan; I would adopt/modify as I saw fit. I had the same team the whole time. We conducted Arabian University on the mess decks (where terrorism concerns would be voiced). I personally briefed the officers and chiefs, principally in CIC. The general terrorism materials provided to COLE mentioned Yemen only as a country, among others, with THREATCON BRAVO. There was not a Yemen-specific slide.

A real problem here is that each ship has to "pull" the necessary and available information from the 5th Fleet Rosetta Stone (a web site). We would have received a face-to-face brief from the 5th fleet staff - but only after pulling into Bahrain which was supposed to occur some three and a half days later.

We had no Arabic linguist on board, had not yet received the Arabic language warning tapes for small craft - it appeared to be a brief, routine stop for fuel, at a dolphin with no pierside access. We receive hundreds, perhaps over a thousand Intel messages a month and our Intel Specialist Chief Petty Officer has to cull the necessary data. Even so - there was no Intel to suggest something might happen in Yemen that day.

In 6th Fleet the information is pushed to the command: the logistics, who the Husbanding Agents are for each port, the Points of contact, how they do LOGREQs. There is an "in-chopper" message for each country which includes the terrorist threats.

With intelligence, background briefings, port information that would have indicated the remotest sense of immediate threat, that ship would have had the tools to develop and implement an effective Force Protection plan. Because none of that was available, the ship was consequently unable to develop that plan, to train to the plan and have it fully implemented prior to the COLE's arrival in Yemen. The shortfall is in our Force Protection process.

End of Summary ---