22 October, 2000

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MEMORANDUM

From: LCDR [redacted] USN [redacted]

Subj: OBSERVATION OF EVENTS SURROUNDING THE EXPLOSION ONBOARD USS COLE (DDG 67) INPORT ADEN, YEMEN ON 12 OCT 00

1. I am LCDR [redacted], the Executive Officer. I reported onboard COLE in December, 1999. The focus of this statement is to concentrate on events leading up to the attack on USS COLE on 12 October, 2000.

2. To lay the groundwork for understanding our force protection and ship's damage control training, it is important to highlight some of the measures taken prior to deployment as well as on deployment.

a. COLE received praise for her efforts during CINCLANTFLT's Force Protection Exercise held in roughly the MAY 00 timeframe.

b. COLE was aggressive in her security posture measures in preceding port visits. For example, in COLE's last port of call, Koper, Slovenia, COLE had placed water barriers on the pier to limit access which caused a high degree of concern among the Slovenian authorities. They stated no other ships had done that, and wondered why we felt it was necessary.

c. We conducted small arms qualifications as often as we could during the deployment, but due to operations off the coast of Montenegro and the high speed transit to the gulf, it was difficult to accomplish as many as we would have liked.

d. I ensured we conducted at least one General Quarters Drill a week. Most of the drills this deployment were Integrated Training Team drills which focused on multiple hits and mass conflagration. During these drills we almost always conducted stretched bearer training which paid off immensely during the terrorist attack. During this training we also utilized our CMC in his alternate role as Aft BDS leader and he also led some of the stretcher bearer training. On Saturday, 7 OCT 00, the day prior to going through the Suez Canal, we conducted a CBR drill and practiced setting zebra. We kept the ship in Material Condition Modified Zebra from the time we were in the Adriatic to the time we entered Aden, Yemen, which helped us tremendously in controlling damage on the day of the blast.

e. Every day from the transit from the Adriatic to the day before entering Yemen, we conducted daily OPS/Intel/Arabian Gulf briefings for all key watchstanders and supervisors (essentially all khaki not on the watchbill). Often we conducted these briefings on the mess decks due to the large number of people attending the briefs. In these briefings we discussed our Weapons Posture, THREATCON, Threat levels and other important security details. We discussed the recently released message from Naval,

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Criminal Investigative Service (DIRNAVCRIMINVSERV 082100Z OCT 00) which designated a new 4 level system (High, Significant, Moderate, and Low) for terrorism threats. Under the old 3 level NCIS system (High, Medium, Low), Yemen was High [redacted] In the new system, Yemen was reclassified to the level of Significant. Since we were planning on implementing Force Protection Measures for Threat Condition Bravo and a threat level of High, we decided to not make any changes since the threat level either remained the same or slightly decreased depending on how you compared the new with the old system.

f. On the day we arrived in Port Said, I got on the IMC and explained to the crew the erupting Israeli-Palestinian conflict, how serious it was and how it would probably affect the other Arab countries that we would be operating near. I explained to the crew the reasons for our increased security posture at anchorage there and going through the canal. I told them that we would be radiating SPY while going through the Canal and at anchorage so they needed to stand clear of the SPY deck which was unusual for us at anchorage.

g. For all the visitors which boarded us for the Canal transit, they were all escorted. The vendors, linehandlers and electricians were kept on the mess decks and the pilots were always escorted topside from the pilot's ladder to the bridge.

h. The reasons for radiating SPY so close to land was to possibly detect any inbound aircraft to us and to let anyone monitoring our electronic transmissions that they would see our SPY signature and it could possibly serve as a deterrent.

i. During the Navigation brief for entering Aden, Yemen, held the evening before at 1900 on 11 OCT 00, we discussed the lack of information on where we were going to moor. We based some of our information on possible moorings from previous ship visit messages (USS BARRY 301650Z OCT 00 and USS TAYLOR 230715Z NOV 99) and emails (DONALD COOK ENG to COLE ENG). We knew about the special fueling dolphin and discussed that we wanted to be moored stbd side to it in the event of a security emergency if we had to leave the port quickly without assistance. We also discussed the request by the US Embassy to fly the Yemen flag upon our entering port apparently at the request of the Yemenis. We didn't have a Yemen flag so it was thought that it would be delivered to us by the pilot or husbanding agent.

3. Here is the sequence of events I recall on 12 OCT 00:

- We had an early reveille (0530) since we wanted to get the pilot onboard at 0700. Communications with the Harbor authorities/pilots were extremely difficult. After repeated requests for when they could send out the pilot or what time they had for us entering port, they failed to answer. That is, they would acknowledge our initial call-ups but wouldn't answer any of our key questions like when they could pick us up. There was just one ship trying to enter port ahead of us, so they were not that busy. We ended up doing small circles while we awaited information. They did initially ask us for some information on our ship characteristics which I thought was unusual since we never did

that before on the bridge-to-bridge prior to entering port. I recall them asking our draft, length, complement, and gross tonnage.

- Once the pilot informed us to proceed into port, he didn't come out to the marked pilot pick-up but instead insisted we enter the channel itself first. COLE then proceeded towards his position and he eventually boarded prior to entering the channel. Once the pilot was onboard he was insistent that we go faster and that we moor port side to. It was only after much persuasion from the CO and that we had a refueling riser on the stbd side, that the pilot relented and agreed to let us moor stbd side to.

- Shortly after the pilot boarded, one of the flight deck safety officers, GMC [redacted] called up saying that there was a small white boat on our stbd quarter. I thought this might be the boat with the Yemen flag since the pilot did not carry it. It did not approach the ship and maintained a parallel course with us. It was carrying 5-6 male personnel, perhaps 2 or 3 were in some sort of uniform. I went back inside the bridge and did not notice where it went after that.

- We proceeded towards the fueling dolphin and made up tugs about 1000 yds from the island. Once abeam of the island we pivoted around so we were stbd side to. There were at least 2 small white boats as line handling boats. I noticed that the pilot had to argue frequently and loudly over movement of the lines with the small boats. On the pier were about a dozen or so individuals, perhaps two in uniform. We spent about 45 mins getting lines arranged and the ship positioned across from the riser.

- During this period I got a call from the flight deck saying there was some individual trying to climb up the pilot's ladder and that we chased him off with the line gun. This seemed unusual to me. Since all lines were over and only fine tune adjustments were being made, I decided to leave the bridge and proceed to the fantail to see who was trying to board. Once I got there I saw a small 20 foot white boat with 3 people. One individual was dressed fairly well and appeared to be the husbanding agent, which we were expecting. I then allowed that individual to climb aboard. He introduced himself as the husbanding agent and I and another Combat Systems petty officer searched his bag. He had a cell phone and paperwork. I called for the Supply Officer who came back to meet and escort him. I directed that the ladder be raised back up and the white boat left.

- I then went back up to the bridge in time to see them secure restricted maneuvering and shortly afterwards the Sea and Anchor detail. I was asked to escort the pilot down to the pilot's ladder once we had given him all our gifts. On the way to the fantail, the pilot was extremely insistent that I move the pilot's ladder from the aft port side to the port midships (eventually where the explosion occurred). He claimed that there was less of a hull rake there. This did not seem to make sense since it's a shorter climb on the fantail and the hull rake is the same. He repeatedly made this request to me. I denied it to him and let him off the ship at the fantail. I reported this conversation to the CO and he concurred with not moving the ladder.

- Also on the bridge before leaving, I was asked where we wanted to station the

OOD(inport). Since we didn't have a brow, it was not an obvious choice. I recommended that the OOD be stationed in the stbd amidships quarterdeck since that would allow for both a good oversight of refueling as well as an unobstructed observation of the pier.

- As I was heading to my stateroom, the Supply Officer said both trash and water were extremely cheap here. I was interested in taking on water since I thought we would be refueling for about 8 hours based on the feedback from previous ships. I wasn't sure about the trash since we've been cost conscious and didn't want unnecessary charges. I asked the CO about trash and water and he said yes to water and no to trash, based on cost saving reasons. About 30 mins later Supply Officer approached me again saying the plastic waste bins were overflowing, so I went with her to the CO's cabin to discuss it again. While there, she said that the plastic discs of compressed waste plastic were overflowing the bin and at the price of $150, this would be a good opportunity to get rid of them. The CO finally agreed and we paid for the trash services. Trash was subsequently collected on the fantail.

- My next concern was determining the pumping rate so I could then plan the schedule for the afternoon. We were surprised to hear how fast the pumping rate was and learned we would be completed within 2 hours. After discussing this with the CO, I put out on the 1MC that the ship expected to complete refueling around 1300-1330 and we would shortly thereafter set Sea and Anchor detail. The Navigation brief for departing Aden was going to be around 1245. I checked with Supply Officer and she said that almost all if not all bills would be paid by the time refueling was complete.

- I then proceeded to my 1100 MWR meeting in the training room. At 1118 or so the explosion occurred. I rushed up to the DC deck, saw Sailors covered in black soot and pointing to their ears that they could not hear. The crew was beginning to congregate in confusion near the aft AFFF station, with those fleeing aft from the mess decks running into those fleeing forward from the flight deck. I took charge of the gathering body of people there and divided them up into groups to either set zebra, fight damage, take care of the wounded or man topside weapons (SCAT) stations. I then went to Central Control Station and directed damage control efforts there. I established communication with Combat Systems Maintenance Central and tried to get communications restored to repair lockers 2 and 3. I checked on the status of power and saw that NR 3 GTG remained online but we're unable to start 1 or 2 GTGs. I also tried to ascertain the extent of flooding below the main deck and helped direct the stopping of progressive flooding. The 1MC was down so most communications occurred over WICS and the 25MC. I directed the Repair Lockers to get into the damaged areas as soon as possible to look for wounded and apply AFFF to the fuel leaks. I established communications with OPS and directed that communications be established with the Navy or National Chain of Command. I was informed that LT [redacted] was able to send a JMCIS note but radio lost power and numerous antennas were damaged. I then directed that the wounded be moved to the aft BDS since the logroom and Main Medical Station were overflowing. Once I got the word all was safe topside, I directed that we start moving the wounded out to the flight deck. After turning over damage control to the Engineer Officer I proceeded

out the aft airlock and directed that the wounded be gathered there awaiting transportation. We rigged a temporary sun shelter and started to prioritize casualties. I coordinated with the CO in determining which casualties needed to leave the ship first. After the first brow/ladder was rigged amidships I then directed that another brow ladder be rigged aft in order to expedite the transfer of wounded ashore. I then gathered other crewmembers to serve as blood donors at the local hospitals. I appointed a Petty Officer to annotate which personnel were leaving the ship and for what reason. I also helped coordinate our transfer of wounded and other assistance from the Regional Deming Team and US Embassy personnel who showed up soon after the explosion. There are more details about the events after the explosion, but will tailor this statement to what proceeded.

4. Force Protection

All force protection measures were adhered to as listed in USS COLE msg dtg 071856ZOCT00 for Threatcon Bravo with most being exceptions that common sense required changes once COLE arrived at the fueling dolphin. Again, we didn't know if COLE was going pierside or refueling at the dolphin prior to entering port.

A. THREATCON ALPH MEASURES:

Measure	Reason Not Implemented
1. Briefing the crew on the threat:	I believe this requirement was completed by the following actions: a. My 1MC announcements made prior to entering the 5th Fleet AOR. I had explained the ongoing conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians and how that would affect many of the Arab countries we were going to visit. b. The daily Ops/Intel briefs also highlighted security concerns. c. The crew was very much aware of the potential for terrorism by our similar postures in previous port visits, the transit through the Suez Canal and news that I would post on the mess line and on the ship's intranet. d. Prior to entering the Mediterranean I had the whole crew sign a Page 13 entry that discussed the importance of the buddy system and conduct ashore that would make

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	our Sailors less of a potential target.
6. Post Qualified Armed pier and pier entrance sentries.	COLE was moored to the fueling dolphin which had no road access.
8. Issue Night Vision Devices:	COLE's stay was expected to be 8 hours or less which would have meant the visit would be entirely in daylight hours. If we had stayed overnight, we would have issued night vision devices.
10. Coordinate Pier/Fleet Landing Security with collocated forces and local authorities:	There were no other US forces at the fueling camel and since it was inaccessible by road, the requirement for coordinating security on the pier wasn't as necessary.
12-15. Establish unloading zones, deploy barriers, post signs in local languages and inspect vehicles entering the pier	Not completed since the fueling island was isolated in the bay and there were no roads leading to it so there was no common sense reason to implement these measures on the pier. We did not know how many people the port authorities needed to have on the refueling station to conduct their refueling operations, so small boats came and went from the fueling pier as necessary.
17. Liberty boats make security tour around ship	This was not a liberty port for COLE.
22. Rig Hawespipe covers and rat guards on lines, etc:	Since an overnight stay was not expected and the anchor was left at the dip for the afternoon's Sea and Anchor Detail, there was no need for these items to be rigged.
24. Conduct Security Drills:	No security drills were conducted inport Aden. Our normal inport security training time is near the end of the day which would have been long after COLE left.

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B. THREATCON BRAVO MEASURES:

27. Review liberty policy	Since COLE was only going to be inport to refuel for only a matter of hours, there was not going to be any liberty, so the liberty policy was not reviewed.
30. Remind personnel to look and inspect before entering.	Since this was a working port and there was no brow, this measure did not seem pertinent for the situation.
31. Designate Picket boat crew:	We decided to moor the ship stbd side to specifically to allow us to quickly get underway from the pier and head to sea if there were signs of trouble. We wouldn't have needed tugs if we were in such a position. This itself was a big force protection posture for us. By mooring stbd side to we would not be able to have a picket boat crew on 15 min alert. We did not put the boat in the water prior to mooring since that would have hindered us if we had to make a hasty exit.
32. Armed Brow Watch on Pier:	We did not have a brow so we could not complete this requirement.
33. Restrict Vehicle Access:	Again since this was essentially a refueling, no vehicle traffic was expected, other than garbage barges and pilot pick-up.
45. Conduct Pier Searches:	As discussed earlier, there was no brow which made a pier search obsolete.
50. Material Condition Mod Zebra:	We did not have Material Condition Yoke set in accordance with the instruction, but instead had Mod Zebra set. This provided a higher state of capability to handle damage than what was called for in the instruction and ended up allowing us to combat the explosion that much more effectively. I think it probably saved lives.
56. Fire Hoses:	This step was overlooked in the checklist. However, it was a measure that is primarily designed for crowd control which was not

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	an issue again because the refueling island did not have a road access.
57. Obstruct helo landing areas:	The flight deck was not obstructed, since we were only going to be inport for a short period of time.

5. This concludes my initial personal statement. I am standing by to answer any additional questions.

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LCDR USN

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