

*Submitted to
Proceedings forum
1/15/87*

1

"The War on Paper"

(See R. T. Soule, p. 34-39, January 1987 Proceedings.)

Captain Daniel S. Appleton, U. S. Navy (Retired)—I consider Lieutenant Soule's fine article to be one of the most important to Fleet readiness that has been published for many years. Now, what will or can be done about the problems he describes?

Over 20 years ago, The Chief of Naval Operations gave wide distribution to a report (No 188, Project 11A002A) of an exhaustive study by the Naval Command Systems Support Activity titled "Analysis and Recommendations Concerning the Reporting Workload in the U. S. Pacific Fleet." stating that "these recommendations are being evaluated" within OPNAV. No substantive action resulted.

Over 15 years ago, Admiral Zumwalt as CNO sent a personal memorandum (No. 807-71) to the Fleet Commanders in Chief titled "Reduction in Shipboard Administrative Requirements." His memorandum enclosed a strongly worded commentary (much in the nature of LT Soule's article) by a Fleet officer stating in part that,

"... the handful of experienced officers and petty officers who are desperately needed in a leadership role are virtually the only ones who can handle the directives, thus they must spend full time with paperwork in order for ships to remain administratively viable. . . I can say, flatly and positively, based upon fourteen years at sea in shipboard billets, including three commands of different types in different oceans, that this is a bankrupt course of action. We are already way past the point of diminishing returns, and this course has zero chance for success in the future. Worse than zero--negative."

Admiral Zumwalt added, "I believe sweeping measures are necessary" and asked his CINCs to give the matter their personal attention.

But the situation simply continued to get worse. This past year, the CNO issued a major revision to the Standard Organization and Regulations of the Navy, the (SORM), probably the basic directive governing shipboard management, that retained every administrative requirement it had previously established. The revision was prepared mainly by Reserve personnel assigned for temporary active duty, with no follow-on provision for lasting study and substantive upgrading. (Please see my article titled "Organizing Ships for Battle" in the July 1985 Proceedings concerning the decrepit status of the SORM.) Today the pressures on our warships remain oriented mainly toward maintenance and administration, rather than toward preparation for fighting. And America remains probably less ready for sudden violent naval conflict than we were even before WWI and WW2, for American shipbuilding no longer possesses the capability to replace lost ships.

The problems described by these treatises go beyond "paperwork"; they apply to the entire field of shipboard management and its relationships to ability to fight. There have been many studies of Navy management systems at department and shore activity levels, but never an integrated examination of all the facets of organization, training, control, information transfer, inspections, reports, morale, motivation, evaluation of results, design of equipment and structures, and the relationships of all these components to fighting as well as working, in the immensely complex environment of the naval warship. Don't think that all these facets make up a picture too complicated for systematic study; what they do portray is a challenge that shipboard leaders have to deal with as best they can every day.

Industry and the social sciences have learned much about management systems and their importance to productivity. The Navy seems to have learned almost nothing about helping shipboard leaders to manage their ships, nor is it trying to learn. There is still no "sponsor" for research and integrated design of shipboard management anywhere in our Service: no one to write to or talk to. The Offices of the Secretary and the CNO, the Navy Personnel Research and Development Center, the Naval Postgraduate School, the Naval Military Personnel Command, the Office of Naval Research, the Naval Sea Systems Command, the Naval Education and Training Command, all have written that they neither accept focused responsibility nor recognize a substantial need (at least a budgeted need) for finding solutions to these problems.

The top command levels of the U. S. Navy simply do not relate the problems described by Lieutenant Soule directly to the Fleet's ability to fight. Who could expect to go from two stars to three or from three to four on the premise, "I taught the Navy how to improve management on board ship"? Even if such a challenge were taken seriously, no means yet exist to measure how battle readiness would change as a result.

The saddest part of this picture is that these things are possible.