



By Adm. Phil Davidson, Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces

“ I greatly appreciate your prompt execution of the CNO directed operational pause and the thoughtful, candid assessments and feedback. ”

Your focus was to reinforce the importance of operational fundamentals, our **Plan, Brief, Execute, Debrief (PBED)** behaviors, and to understand the importance of managing risk in every evolution, so in that spirit, I'd like you to think about best practices in these **three** areas.

1. **Fundamentals.** Sufficiency is defined as adequate; proficiency is defined as a high degree of competence, skill, or expertise. To achieve either, your crews must understand the importance of fundamentals. Surface contact management, something every unit must do to conduct safe and effective operations, and surface warfare tactics, what we must do to be able to fight and win, are both dependent upon the same basic bridge and CIC, cockpit and control room skills. Those fundamentals support the **Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act cycle** – the O-O-D-A loop – that underpins all warfare.

The sensors we use to "observe" are identical to both surface contact management and surface warfare and range from eyes on the bridge to automated tracking systems, and the myriad of other sensors and radars we have to "observe." To "orient and decide" is similarly linked, and requires both internal unit and external teams to share common understanding, using common nomenclature, to generate a common picture of location and movement, so that ship's teams like CIC and the bridge, and external teams like a SAG or section, can "act." Surface warfare tactics are derived from basic surface contact management fundamentals.

2. **Teams must be built on the fundamentals.** Proficient teams understand the importance of each individual's contribution, as well as the roles of their teammates, to the safe and effective accomplishment of the mission. I already said high performing teams consistently apply the principles of sound watchstanding (procedural compliance, formality, level of knowledge, questioning attitude, forceful backup, and integrity). I asked you to use the Plan, Brief, Execute, Debrief cycle during the operational pause, as a way to convey to your teams the context behind any evolution and draw out the individual's understanding of their contribution and the risk. That isn't the whole task. It is the job of leadership to build effective teams. These teams range from small work centers to major evolutions like sea and anchor details. I know much of our training delivers individual skills to your Sailors; it is the job of supervisors and khaki to ensure those individuals are assembled into effective teams.



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Whether you call it teambuilding or talent management or a watchbill replacement plan, leadership's job is to build teams that will succeed. It is more than assembling individual skills – it also means assessing the talents, capabilities, and attributes of your people, and their ability to work together. It means examining, monitoring – and improving – the performance of your teams. If a team is functioning only because of the talents of one or two people in that team, you may risk failure when one or the other are off their game. If someone's individual skills fall short of proficiency, then remediate their skills before re-qualification.

3. **That leaves us with risk.** I discussed some of the tools – like watchbills, night orders, and briefs – that help you assess, manage, and mitigate risk for your teams. If your admin doesn't work for you, then you're not using it correctly. Safe and effective units incorporate risk identification and risk mitigation into both their daily and special evolutions. High performing teams ensure repeated execution does not distract from continuously re-evaluating risk and maintaining safety. Be wary of overconfidence and complacency; these are characteristics of teams with a high operational tempo, yet fail to follow the operational fundamentals, fail to use the PBED cycle, fail to continuously train, and still think that they are building proficiency.

Fatigue and stress also have an adverse effect on peak performance and must be considered and remediated for every watch. It is hard work to build in the time, the awareness, and the processes necessary to stay on top of the risk, but it must be done. Build a culture of constant risk-assessment, and consistently examine, apply, and tailor lessons learned and best practices from other units into your command. And remember, ***can-do*** does not mean ***must-do*** or ***should-do***.

There will be systemic changes to come after I complete the comprehensive review. In the meantime, I direct you to take ***these actions***, to help you build your team's fundamentals and help mitigate risk of repeat incidents.

- a. Validate your team's surface contact management and contact avoidance fundamentals. Surface contact management is a 24/7 responsibility necessary for safe operations, AT/FP defense, and surface warfare. Ensure your bridge and CIC are working continuously, effectively, and collaboratively by ensuring a common surface contact picture between the bridge and CIC. The OOD is responsible for safe navigation and safe maneuvering of the ship.

He or she must ensure the bridge and CIC teams are operating as one, and properly utilizing every tool available, in order to maintain an accurate shipping and navigation picture. The TAO is responsible for fighting the ship and maximizing the employment of the weapons system. This responsibility also includes a complete picture of every contact in the vital area (air/surface/subsurface). These combat related responsibilities do not absolve the TAO from directly supporting safe and effective navigation. The TAO also establishes the Surface Warfare Coordinator's (SUWC) first and enduring responsibility as the primary surface contact management and contact avoidance watch station in CIC. The flow of information between the CIC and the bridge, must be continuous. Recommendations for action and resolution by the OOD from CIC for all surface contacts within the vital area is paramount.



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- b. Qualified and proficient bridge and CIC watchstanders must fully comprehend the tools and equipment available to them (AIS, VMS, ARPA, steering modes, etc.). Documentation supporting safe navigation such as technical manuals, EOSS/CSOSS, local operating procedures, fleet advisories, and system operating manuals must be understood, not with adequacy, but professional proficiency.

Proficient watchstanders must also fully understand how their equipment and associated settings should be adjusted to support rapid changes in weather, sea state, traffic, and other factors.

Proficient watchstanders must recognize and act upon signs of degraded equipment. Bridge and CIC teams must be subject matter experts in the proper operation of AIS, VMS, ARPA, and other radar navigation repeaters. AIS is a partnership between ships operating within VHF range of one another. If in passive, receive-only mode and operating a ship with reduced radar cross section you should assume that other traffic may not have a clear picture of your precise location and movement. This circumstance requires you to mitigate the other ship's understanding with better contact detection management and foresight. AIS in active mode should be used in high-traffic situations in CTF 80 waters.

- c. Drive proficiency into your bridge and CIC navigation team. The Navigation Seamanship Shiphandling Trainer (NSST) is fully funded and installed at all Fleet Concentration Areas (FCAs); they are available for more than the required BRM and other courses. NSST can run high traffic scenarios in any region, test your bridge team's contact management and contact avoidance fundamentals, VHF use, rules of the road knowledge, understanding of your standing orders, and emergency/in extremis response. The NSST can replicate and repeat detailed high-traffic scenarios in all kinds of environmental conditions.
- d. CNSL, CSL, CNAL, and NECC shall develop and implement a plan for all ISICs to evaluate the proficiency of ships/crews to safely navigate in congested water space in the NSST as part of their ISIC navigation check-ride/submarine proficiency training and prior to deployment. Strike Groups and TYCOM staffs will support these ISIC evaluations as required. A plan to remediate deficiencies will be implemented for each ship or submarine should it be necessary.

These evaluations shall emphasize:

1. Rules of the road knowledge/execution
2. Team employment and integration of navigation, radar, contact management systems
3. Reports to the CO, decision making, and leadership
4. Internal/external communications
5. Watch team preparation and planning; and
6. Team performance in routine and stressing scenarios for three watch sections



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- e. SURFLANT recently published guidance on reporting near misses/significant incidents to drive constant improvement across the larger force. All TYCOMS shall review, and if necessary establish, reporting criteria for operational near-miss events and ensure a reporting system is in place in order to provide rapid feedback for individual unit and Fleet-wide improvement. Lead TYCOMs shall routinely disseminate a summary of significant operational mishaps and near misses to ships and training centers.

- f. SUBLANT has developed a concept to address Operational Fundamentals across the submarine force. They are instilling operational planning, assessment and improvement, and team dynamics as core competencies. All TYCOMs will conduct a review of how they currently assess these competencies and determine the best way to periodically assess and reinforce the skills which underpin sustained superior performance. Provide me the results of your review and your plan to assess and sustain superior performance by 24 October.

We are a learning organization operating in an ever changing environment. I applaud your dedication to this mission: to be prepared to conduct prompt and sustained combat incident to operations at sea. Each of you represents an integral part of the most lethal force ever put to sea. It is our charge to ensure this force continues to operate safely and effectively going forward.