

The 6th Ship in the Screen

By Captain Ace Trask, USN, (Ret)

I had just reported to my new duty station as Chief Staff Officer of DESRON 22 homeported in Norfolk, Virginia. The Commodore was CAPT Al Blair, USN, and you could not have asked for a better officer. He was a pure gentleman and excellent Commodore.

After being onboard about a month we were assigned to be the screen commander for the next assignment of ships for a six month MED deployment. The task group consisted of six destroyers to protect the aircraft carrier and the underway replenishment ship, an oiler.

The next morning after departing Norfolk, I was on the torpedo deck looking out over the task group. The Commodore came out to join me and chat. But as he looked around at the screen of destroyers, he only counted five. He then said to me, "I only counted five destroyers, where in the hell is the sixth one?" I looked around and counted five and said "we are standing on the sixth destroyer." We both got a good laugh out of that one.

Underway Replenishment

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Early enroute to the MED, the Commodore was in charge of underway replenishments, which occurred every three days. The night before the first replenishment, the DESRON Staff met in the Commodore's stateroom to go over the tactical signals we would use for all phases of the UNREP. He had us make little paper shaped ships with the hull numbers of each DD, placed in the order they would refuel in and return to the screen. That meant the screen would consist of four screening DD's, a DD refueling and a DD lifeguard astern of the fueling DD. When one DD is finished fueling, it is to return to the screen at 27 knots at which time the lifeguard DD proceeds to go alongside the oiler and one DD leaves the screen to fill the lifeguard station. We would announce the new formation as the fueled DD was leaving the oiler and show the Commodore the order of the refueling by moving the paper ships on his desk. We, the DESRON STAFF, thought this was a waste of time until we called the maneuver for the third ship in the mockup to refuel ---- **OOPS!** We made a mistake in the signal so it was a good thing the Commodore had us show him how it was going to be done!!

As a side note, DD's have to maintain 75% fuel onboard at all times so they can go "anywhere at any time for whatever the mission may be."