

Steel Valley Dolphins

January 2019



The official newsletter of the
USS Requin Base of the USSVI
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

USSVI Creed:

"To perpetuate the memory of our shipmates who gave their lives in the pursuit of duties while serving their country. That their dedication, deeds, and supreme sacrifice be a constant source of motivation toward greater accomplishments. Pledge loyalty and patriotism to the United States of America and its Constitution."



Meetings held on the second Saturday of the month normally in Baden at the American Legion Post and quarterly meetings held around our membership area.

- **Make a difference, get to a meeting!**

----- Pride Runs Deep -----

Next Meeting: 1230 February 9th at the American Legion in Baden Pa.

2017 USS Requin Base Officers

Base Commander	Hubert C. Dietrich	412-486-2635	hueyfromglenshaw@aol.com
1st Vice Commander	Carl Stigers	412-995-8028	carstenstigers@verizon.net
2nd Vice Commander	Rick Elster	412-751-7967	Relster565@comcast.net
Secretary	Jeff Simon	724-502-4505	jeffsimon@zoominternet.net
Treasurer	Lee M. Bookwalter	412-795-8337	booky143@verizon.net
Storekeeper	Frank Nicotra	412-835-6540	nicotrafrank@gmail.com
Chaplain	Carl Stigers	412-995-8028	carstenstigers@verizon.net
Past Base Commander	Joe Campisi	412-322-3201	jcampisi1@comcast.net
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Photographer	Peter Foster	724+980-7657	gopetro2000@gmail.com
SVD Hard Copy	Rick Elster	412-751-7967	relster565@comcast.net

----- Pride Runs Deep -----



Binnacle List

Lois Stewart
Aaron Ellis,
John Lukasik



COMMANDERS COLUMN: - (December – 2018)

Shipmates:

The holidays came up on us like a bat out of h---! Both Edie and I hope everyone had a great Holiday season, a joyous Christmas and Hanukkah besides having a Happy and Healthy New Year to all!

We tried something different this year with our holiday luncheon. We held it at the Baden American Legion. Around 55 members/friends/family were in attendance. The entertainment was out of this world. We had Conrad playing his accordion thru out the party and also had Nick Fiasco singing our favorite hits from Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Tony Bennett, Bobby Darin & others.

Everyone who participated in the male & Female grab-bag were extremely happy with their surprise. The meal was really tasty and enjoyed by all. Thanks to all who helped making this a wonderful event.

The USS Pittsburgh was out on patrol and could not spend the holidays with their families. Kudos to the crew for protecting our freedom so we reaped the benefits of the holiday season. I remember spending the holiday season on the Henry Clay's first patrol. Having such great shipmates helped make the holidays special under water!

BINNICAL LIST:

Lukasik – fighting thru various issues.

ETERNAL PATROL 2018

Edward Cramer 1/5 Ed Paul 1/14 Vince Singeleon 1/20 James Ross 2/12
James Lasher 9/8 Sal Moliterno 9/18 Charles Schwertfeger 10/22
Major Galloway 10/30

FAIR WINDS AND FOLOWING SEAS – WE HAVE YOUR WATCH – SHIPMATES

NEW MEMBERS – 2018

Bahr, Lawrence, Loskoch, Miller, Pellegrino, Spencer, Swords, Underkoffler, Weible, Burelson, Kalimon, Ilift, Regrits, Huff

Al Regrits – was a member of the base in 2017 and has decided to renew for 2019.

William Huff qualified on the USS Rhode Island (Blue) SSBN740. He is active duty for the last 18 years and presently serving on a “target” – USS CARTER HALL LSD-50, in Norfolk, Va. Bill lives with his family in Zelienople, Pa. His next of kin is his mother C. Diane Householder. Bill has just been promoted to O4 (Lt. Commander) and had a re-inactment ceremony on board the Requin with family, friends, and Requin Base shipmates. Please email Commander Bill and welcome him aboard – standingby16@hotmail.com

MEMBERSHIP RETENTION:

January 1st was the official “DINK DAY”! We had one (1) DINK for 2019! He told me that the check is in the mail!!!!

We also have eleven (11) shipmates who have not reached out to us. Their home address, email, telephone number are not up to date. Some of their mail has been returned, with bad email address and disconnected telephones. The following have been deleted from our deck log as members of the Base.

Pain, Wesley – Schmidt, Robert L. (NJ) - Simmons, William. – Stoner, Charles – Taylor, Donald - Beadle, William – Bonn, Michael. – Murman, Albert – Nunnery, Douglas – Indo, Frank & Julian, Daniel

If you know any of these shipmates and can reach out to them, please do so and let us know so we can welcome them back into the base.

ITS SO IMPORTANT TO KEEP YOUR RECORDS UP TODATE!!!!

	BIRTHDAYS	ANNIVERSARIES
MEMBER	FIRST MATES	
Larry Iden 1/05/43	Rita Lindsay 1/02	Carl & Carol Benson 1/20
Bill Kielar 1/16/30	Jennifer May 1/13	Bob & Kim Bittner 1/06
Mike Markel 1/15/41	Kelly McKinney 1/15	Bob & Donna Garlock 1/10
Robert Moore 1/08/48	Sandra Morgan 1/10	Boy & Lynn Gourley 1/08
Angelo Naso 1/27/42	Carmen Murman 1/01	Dave & Dianne Howton 1/27
Fred Nelson 1/29/44	Tina Siege 1/15	Fred & Carmen Nelson 1/26
James Phelan 1/20/38	Cynthia Weaver 1/07	John & Susan Sutherin Jr. 1/08
Bob J. Schmidt 1/15/61	Barbara Farina 1/09	Carl & Gosia Humes 1/18
Brian Siege 1/23/66	Joan Hughes 1/08	

Dan Phelps 1/06/62

Jeff Iliff 1/09/68

Art Kalimon 1/01/45

Paul Wassenberg 1/22/34

Heb Wise 1/13/39

ANY CORRECTION OR ADDITIONS – Please email and let me know.

COMMANDERS COLUMN – (JANUARY 2019)

The Base membership stands at 178. We are still waiting on one (1) more shipmate to renew. We have a self- imposed quota to recruit at least 10 new members each year to keep our membership on an even keel. I would like to reach the magic number of 200 base members. So don't forget, if you recruit a new member then you will receive one (1) years free base dues.

BASE OFFICERS FOR 2019

Base Commander – Huey Dietrich	First Vice Commander – Carl Stigers
Second Vice Commander- Rick Elster	Secretary – Jeff Simon
Treasurer – Lee Bookwalter	Storekeeper – Frank Nicotra
Chaplain – Carl Stigers	Newsletter Editor – Jack Sutherin
Webmaster – Lee Bookwalter	COB/Historian – Clyde Porter
BaseWebmaster – Lou Hamil	SVD Hard Copy- Rick Elster
Photographer – Peter Foster	Past Base Commander -Joe Campisi

We are looking for a BASE AWARDS CHAIRMAN – ASSISTANT PHOTOGRAPHER – ASSISTANT NEWS EDITOR

STANDING COMMITTEES

Kap(SS)4Kid(SS) – Huey Dietrich Eagle Scouts – James Metz

NEED VOLUNTEERS FOR THE FOLLOWING:

2019 – USS Pittsburgh SSN720 visit – (St Pats week end)

2019 – Requin Base 25th Anniversary Party

2019 – Requin Base Christmas Meeting/Party

HOLLAND CLUB MEMBERS FOR 2019

George Brown	Mike Allen	James Bence	James List
John Lukasik	Paul McKenzie	Terry Swinney	Art Kalimon

BIRTHDAYS

ANNIVERSARIES

MEMBERS

FIRST MATES

George Dolgos 2/25/44	Jennifer Beachler 2/15	Kato & Carolyn Davenport 2/28
Lawton Gains 2/19/44	Kim Bittner 2/19	Ed & Jennifer May 2/13
Dick Geyer 2/15/42	Carolyn Davenport 2/04	Paul & Yvone McKenzie 2/15
James Harris 2/26/39	Agnas Franz 2/02	Al & Marilyn Regrets 2/24
Steve McKinney 2/15/72	Linda Gaylor 2/09	Andy & Barbara Sorbie 2/02
Russ Osborn 2/05/50	Lynn Gourley 2/10	
James St. Clair 2/05/42	Marilyn Klein 2/12	
Jack Sutherin, Sr. 2/03/42	Jackie Krautstrunk 2/26	
Fred Koppenhaven 2/29/43	Rosemary Riley 2/26	
Ron Weaver 2/03/49	Isabelle Watson 2/22	
Mike Houston 2/12/66	Adele Wise 2/28	

REQUIN BASE WW11 MEMBERS:

Richard Biemer – Hubert Brown – Herbert Hollingworth – Robert Kaufman –
Robert Krautstrunk – Robert Stahl – Fred Voskuhl – Robert Watson

(Eternal Patrol in 2018 – Molitierno, S., Ross, James, Schwertfeger, Charles)

CREW MEMBERS OF THE USS REQUIN SS/SSR481

James Bence	Dennis Cantwell	Kato Davenport	John Donnelly
Lawton Gains	James Harris	Charles Hilgendorf	Robert Krautstrunk
Merlin Larson	Robert Moore	Charles Nixon	Alfred Regits
Earl Riley	Robert Sampson	Richard Simpson	John Stewart
Paris Von Rabenau		Herb Wise	

LOYALTY PIN – REQUIN BASE FOR 2019

FIVE	TEN	FIFTEEN	TWENTY	TWENTY FIVE
Martin Abel	Bob Davis	Jon Bruce	Ron Lucas	Hubert Brown
John Algee	Huey Dietrich	Aaron Ellis	Bob Moore	Mike Markel
Mike Amenti	James Harris	Lawton Gains	Bob Watson	Angelo Naso
Dan Bagley	John Sipes	Jim Johnston		Jim Phelan
Jess Coker	Bob Stahl	Robert Keller		Dick Simpson
James Cower		Bob Krautstrunk		Andy Sorbie
Greg Poole		Merlin Larsen		
Josh Sewel		James St.Clair		

The above shipmates received their pins with their calendar and dues notice.

REQUIN BASE BOOSTER DRIVE

The Requin Base is kicking off its annual booster drive. This fund raiser has always been successful and it helps us balance our yearly budget without going into our reserves. Each year we solicit individuals, groups and veteran organizations to support us by becoming a BOOSTER. The yearly funds that support our budget, comes from membership dues, selling of USSVI calendars, Edie's Jam, candy sales, small stores and our booster drive.

If you belong to any organization of clubs, they are excellent partners. And if you are working, you could ask your employer and you will be surprised when he says yes.

Over the course of the last (8) years, we have been fortunate to have successful booster drives, and we not only reach our goals, but exceeded it. We also have great support from our members, who not only contributed, but solicited boosters to both their family and friends. There will be a sample letter in the next issue of the SVD, and also at the next base meeting.

REQUIN BASE CANDY PROGRAM

Our candy program is up and running all year long. Shipmate Bernie Sigler (DBF), our candy Czar, purchases the bars from Daffins and fills the orders as quickly as possible. The candy comes in boxes of 36 bars and the cost is \$1.00 per bar. The

candy bars consist of Milk Chocolate, Crunchy, Peanut Butter, Carmel, Almond and Dark Chocolate. We can make up a box of assorted bars for your preference.

The program is set up this way – the member orders the candy and pays upfront. Then to recoup his money, he sells the 36 bars of candy and it does not cost him a penny. The \$36.00 per box is divided - \$18.00 is given back to the candy company and the other \$18.00 is given to the base. The member decides which base activity that he wants the candy profit (\$18.00) to go to: Kap(SS)4Kid(SS), Eagle Scouts, Base Memorial Fund or the General Fund! The bottom line is – it helps us to balance our budget for 2019. You can order the candy directly from Bernie – menhaden377@yahoo.com and pick up at the next base meeting. If you want your candy order in boxes mixed, then reach to to me and I will mix them.

REQUIN BASE

MEETING & ACTIVITIES SCHEDULE – 2019

TENTATIVE FOR THE YEAR

BASE MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES

Jan 05 – Requin Base Board Meeting – A.L. Baden, PA

Jan 12 – American Legion – Baden, PA

Feb 09 – American Legion – Baden, PA

March 09 – American Legion Post 902 – Houston, PA

March 13 – Wed – PITTSBURGH arrives late

March 14 – Thur – PITTSBURGH in town

March 15 – Fri – PITTSBURGH/Navy League/Subvets –(Soldiers & Sailors)

March 16 – Sat – PITTSBURGH/St. Patrick’s Day parade

March 17 – Sun – PITTSBURGH departs early

April 13 – American Legion – Baden, PA – Holland Club inductees (2019)

May 11 – American Legion – Baden, PA

May 26 – Memorial (Requin) AM

May 26 – Carnegie Parade PM

May 27 – Sewickley Parade AM

May 27 – Coraopolis Parade PM

June 08 – American Legion Post 290, Columbiana, Ohio

July 4 – Canonsburg Parade AM
July 4 – Leetsdale Parade PM
July 13 – American Legion, Baden. PA
August 10 – Golf- Country Club, Freeport PA (Rt 28 North)
Sept 1 – Requin Birthday Ball (25 years) German Club
Sept 14 – American Legion, Baden, PA
October 12 – New Castle PA
Nov 9 – American Legion, Baden, Pa
Nov ? – Veterans Day Parade Beaver County
Dec 1 – Christmas Luncheon, German Club
Dec 7 – Pearl Harbor Day

FUTURE ACTIVITIES:

1. Requin Base 25th anniversary 9/01/2019
2. USS PITTSBURGH – Activities Mar 13 thru Mar 17
3. USS COD – Reciprocal meetings with COD Base (Cleveland OH) and Requin Base
4. Shipmate George Brown – ABE LINCOLN boat re-union in Pittsburgh
5. Shipmate Gerry Gaylor – RONQUIL boat re-union in Cleveland Ohio.

Requin Base Meeting Minutes

January 12, 2019

Baden, PA

Base Commander Huey Dietrich called the meeting to order.

Attendees: Mike Allen, Tino & Sally Bolcato, Lee & Patsy Bookwalter, Clair & Nancy Bouts, Don Bright, George Brown, Ron Campbell, Joe Campisi, Huey & Edie Dietrich, Gerry & Linda Gaylor, Dick & Beverly Geyer, Bob & Lynn Gourley, Art Kalimon, Bill & Sandy Lindsey, Chuck & Nancy Loskoch, Bat Masterson, JB Messer, Marian Miller, Vince Metzke, Frank Nicotra, Mike Pellegrino, Jim & Sondra Schwarz, Chuck Shrum, Harry Sills, Jeff & Eileen Simon, Carl Stigers, Jack & Jenny Sutherin, John Swords, Chad Underkoffer, Mike & Tina Wyckoff

Base Commander Huey Dietrich: Quote of the day: "Submarine life is not a service but a religion"

Requin History: Launched January 1, 1945. January 20, 1948 given hull classification OSSR-481 and modified to the Migrain II radar picket configuration. January 15, 1951 entered Mediterranean until May when she returned to normal operations on the US east coast and in the Caribbean. January 1, 1953 maintained her schedule of Second and Sixth Fleet operations but at the end of the year put into Philadelphia PA for extensive modernization overhaul that among other things removed her last remaining anti-aircraft cannon.

Base Commander Huey Dietrich: Let us at this time, with a moment of silent prayer, remember our Shipmates who made the supreme sacrifice that we may gather here in Peace. We dedicate this meeting to our Shipmates on Eternal Patrol, to perpetuate their memories in our lives and to honor our Shipmates on active duty in the service of the first line of defense of our Nation.

Boats Lost:

USS SCORPION (SS 278)	January 05, 1944
USS ARGONAUT (SS 166)	January 10, 1943
USS SWORDFISH (SS 193)	January 12, 1945
USS S 36 (SS 141)	January 20, 1942
USS S 26 (SS 131)	January 24, 1942

We also honor our departed shipmate of the Requin Base, John Good, Robert Goodley, Tom Stewart, Earl Wood, Ed Cramer, Ed Paul and Vince Segeleon. Finally let us remember all the brave submariners who died performing their duties aboard submarines, some individually and some in groups, but where the submarine itself was not lost.

Chaplain Carl Stigers gave the Invocation.

Base Secretary Jeff Simon led the Base in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Members introduced themselves and the boats they qualified on.

Base Secretary Jeff Simon reported that Minutes of the previous meeting and Executive Board Meeting were published on the Requin Base website. With no objections, the minutes were approved as published.

Treasurer Lee Bookwalter gave an accounting of base assets, expenditures, and deposits are available upon request. With no objections, the report was approved.

Other Reports:

Binnacle List: Lois Stewart, Aaron Ellis, John Lukasik
Membership stands at 178.

Storekeeper Frank Nicotra reported on available small stores.

Memorial And Ceremonies

Members are encouraged to see the Calendar on the Requin Base Website for upcoming activities, events, birthdays and anniversaries.

Old Business:

None

New Business:

Joint meetings with Cod Base are being planned.

Relations with the Science Center were discussed.

Requin Base Officers were sworn in.

Members are asked to volunteer for assistant Base Photographer, assistant Newsletter Editor.

Base budget for 2019 as published in the Executive Board Meeting minutes was discussed and approved by the members present.

For The Good Of The Order:

Volunteers are need for the following committees: USS Pittsburgh visit in March, Requin Base 25th anniversary on September 1, and Christmas luncheon.

Commissioning of SSN-790 USS South Dakota will occur in Groton CT on February 2.

Chaplain Carl Stigers gave the Benediction and blessing of today's meal.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned.

Next meeting: Baden PA American Legion at 1230 hours on February 9, 2019

Worse than you thought: inside the secret Fitzgerald probe the Navy doesn't want you to read

By: Geoff Ziezulewicz 4 days ago

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Erin Elizabeth Rehm receives the American flag from Vice Adm. Jan Tighe during a graveside service for her husband, Fire Controlman Chief Gary Leo Rehm Jr., at Arlington National Cemetery on Aug. 16, 2017. Rehm died when the guided-missile destroyer Fitzgerald collided with the Philippine-flagged merchant vessel ACX Crystal on June 17, 2017. (Elizabeth Fraser/ Arlington National Cemetery)

A scathing internal Navy probe into the 2017 collision that drowned seven sailors on the guided-missile destroyer Fitzgerald details a far longer list of problems plaguing the vessel, its crew and superior commands than the service has publicly admitted.

Obtained by Navy Times, the “dual-purpose investigation” was overseen by Rear Adm. Brian Fort and submitted 41 days after the June 17, 2017, tragedy.

It was kept secret from the public in part because it was designed to prep the Navy for potential lawsuits in the aftermath of the accident.

Unsparingly, Fort and his team of investigators outlined critical lapses by bridge watchstanders on the night of the collision with the Philippine-flagged container vessel ACX Crystal in a bustling maritime corridor off the coast of Japan.

Their report documents the routine, almost casual, violations of standing orders on a Fitz bridge that often lacked skippers and executive officers, even during potentially dangerous voyages at night through busy waterways.

The probe exposes how personal distrust led the officer of the deck, Lt. j.g. Sarah Coppock, to avoid communicating with the destroyer's electronic nerve center — the combat information center, or CIC — while the Fitzgerald tried to cross a shipping superhighway.

When Fort walked into the trash-strewn CIC in the wake of the disaster, he was hit with the acrid smell of urine. He saw kettlebells on the floor and bottles filled with pee. Some radar controls didn't work and he soon discovered crew members who didn't know how to use them anyway.

Fort found a Voyage Management System that generated more “trouble calls” than any other key piece of electronic navigational equipment. Designed to help watchstanders navigate without paper charts, the VMS station in the skipper's quarters was broken so sailors cannibalized it for parts to help keep the rickety system working.

Since 2015, the Fitz had lacked a quartermaster chief petty officer, a crucial leader who helps safely navigate a warship and trains its sailors — a shortcoming known to both the destroyer's squadron and Navy officials in the United States, Fort wrote.

Fort determined that Fitz's crew was plagued by low morale; overseen by a dysfunctional chiefs mess; and dogged by a bruising tempo of operations in the Japan-based 7th Fleet that left exhausted sailors with little time to train or complete critical certifications.

To Fort, they also appeared to be led by officers who appeared indifferent to potentially life-saving lessons that should've been learned from other near-misses at sea, including a similar incident near Sasebo, Japan, that occurred only five weeks before the ACX Crystal collision, Fort wrote.

The guided-missile destroyer Fitzgerald sails limps back to Japan following a collision with a merchant vessel on June 17, 2017. (Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images)

‘Significant progress’

Fort’s work took on added urgency after another destroyer assigned to the 7th Fleet, the John S. McCain, collided with the Liberian-flagged tanker Alnic MC on Aug. 21, 2017, killing 10 more American sailors.

But it remained an internal file never to be shared with the public.

Pentagon officials declined to answer specific questions sent by Navy Times about the Fort report and instead defended the decision to keep the contents of the report hidden from public scrutiny.

“The Navy determined to retain the legal privilege in order to protect the legal interests of the United States, but provided information regarding the causes and lessons learned to families of those sailors, the Congress and the American people, again to make every effort to ensure these types of tragedies to not happen again,” said Navy spokesman Capt. Gregory Hicks in a prepared written statement to Navy Times.

In the 19 months since the fatal collision, the Navy’s Readiness Reform Oversight Council has made “significant progress” in implementing reforms called for in several top-level Navy reviews of the Fitzgerald and McCain collisions — nearly 75 percent of the 111 recommendations slated to be implemented by the end of 2018, Hicks added.

Navy Times withheld publication of the Fort report’s details until Pentagon officials could brief the families of the dead Fitz sailors about the grim findings.

Sailors Xavier Martin, Dakota Rigsby, Shingo Douglass, Tan Huynh, Noe Hernandez, Carlos Sibayan and Gary Rehm drowned in the disaster.

Coppock pleaded guilty to a dereliction of duty charge at court-martial last year.

The Fitz’s commanding officer, Cmdr. Bryce Benson, and Lt. Natalie Combs, who ran the CIC, are battling similar charges in court but contend unlawful command influence by senior leaders scuttled any chance for fair trials.

When Fort arrived at her CIC desk, he found a stack of paperwork Combs abandoned: “She was most likely consumed and distracted by a review of Operations Department paperwork for the three and a half hours of her watch prior to the collision,” Fort wrote.

Family, friends and shipmates attended a memorial ceremony at Fleet Activities Yokosuka on June 27, 2017, for the seven sailors killed when the guided-missile destroyer Fitzgerald collided with a merchant vessel off the coast of Japan 10 days earlier. (Navy)

Lessons unlearned

Although Fort’s report drew parallels to a 2012 non-fatal accident involving the destroyer Porter and the super-tanker M/V Otowasan in the Strait of Hormuz, his investigation focused on a near-miss by the Fitzgerald near Sasebo on May 10, 2017.

During that incident, an unnamed junior officer “became confused by the surface contact picture” of vessels surrounding the destroyer and summoned the warship’s then-commanding officer, Cmdr. Robert Shu, to the bridge, according to Fort.

Shu set the course to steer the Fitz behind the merchant vessel and then left the bridge.

But once the officer in charge had cleared the other ship’s stern, he “became immediately aware that another vessel was on the opposite side” of the ship they had just dodged, Fort wrote.

“(The officer) sounded five short blasts and ordered all back full emergency to avoid collision,” something Lt. j.g. Coppock failed to do weeks later when the ACX Crystal loomed out of the darkness, the report states.

To Fort, the earlier incident should've been a wakeup call for both Shu and Cmdr. Benson, his executive officer who would soon "fleet up" to replace him as skipper, plus Benson's future second-in-command, Cmdr. Sean Babbitt.

"FTZ's command leadership was unaware of just how far below standards their command had drifted," wrote Fort, a surface warfare officer with more than a quarter-century of experience. "Had the (commanding officer) and (executive officer) critiqued the near-collision, they may have identified the root causes uncovered by this investigation."

When contacted by Navy Times, Shu recalled the incident that took place just east of the Tsushima Strait, "a normally busy and recognized waterway."

"As I was heading down the ladderwell to my cabin, I heard five short blasts and felt the ship back," Shu said. "I ran back up to the bridge and there was another vessel behind the one we had just maneuvered for."

Although Shu couldn't recall how close the two vessels got to each other, he insisted that the incident wasn't a near-collision and that his bridge team "reacted appropriately" and later assured him that they had a good picture of the vessels around their destroyer.

But Fort's investigation pointed to a disturbing pattern of watchstanders failing to follow standing orders from a skipper and XO who often were inexplicably absent from the bridge, even when the warship was transiting potentially dangerous waters at night.

One junior officer spoke of a similar near-collision during low visibility, when a watch team finishing their shift failed to identify a vessel that was closing on them and wasn't being tracked, according to the report. The oncoming officer of the deck maneuvered out of the vessel's way but never notified the commanding officer.

Watchstanders admitted to knowing of other instances when ships got close enough to trigger a call to the CO, but they never made it, according to the report.

"Procedural compliance by Bridge watchstanders is not the norm onboard FTZ, as evidenced by numerous, almost routine, violations of the CO's standing orders," not to mention radio transmissions laced with profanity and "unprofessional humor," Fort found.

The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer Fitzgerald was heavily damaged during a June 17, 2017, collision with a merchant vessel.

Rules of the road

Benson and predecessor Shu spent little time on the bridge during nighttime transits and Benson was asleep in his quarters on the fateful night the Fitzgerald collided with the ACX Crystal, Fort wrote.

Some of Benson's bridge team had never transited the busy waterway before, or had only done so during the day, and "his watchstanders were at least as fatigued as he was from a long day of operations without sufficient rest," Fort found.

It also was Benson's first transit from Sagami Bay to the open sea as the warship's skipper, a command he assumed just a few days after the near-collision off Sasebo.

"It is inexplicable that neither Benson nor (executive officer Cmdr. Babbitt) were on the bridge for his first outbound Yokosuka transit as CO, at night, in close proximity to land, and expecting moderately dense fishing and merchant traffic," Fort wrote.

Ship travel is governed by the "rules of the road," a set of guidelines regarding speed, lookouts and other best practices to avoid collisions, but Fort's report casts doubt on whether watchstanders on board the Fitz and sister warships in the 7th Fleet had sufficient knowledge of them to safely navigate at sea.

About three weeks after the ACX Crystal disaster, Fort's investigators sprang a rules of the road pop quiz on Fitz's officers.

It didn't go well. The 22 who took the test averaged a score of 59 percent, Fort wrote.

"Only 3 of 22 Officers achieved a score over 80%," he added, with seven officers scoring below 50 percent.

The same exam was administered to the wardroom of another unnamed destroyer as a control group, and those officers scored similarly dismal marks.

The XO Babbitt, Coppock and two other officers refused to take the test, according to the report.

Reached by email, Babbitt told Navy Times that he declined because of the investigation and the fact that Fort had read him his rights.

"The exam was also given weeks after the collision when the wardroom had not been concentrating on the rules of the road," he said. "The crew had been pulled from event to event to include the memorial service and the dignified send off and the last thing anyone had been thinking about was how many lights a 50 meter towing vessel on inland waterways should have."

Speaking through his defense attorney, Benson declined to comment on the Fort report's findings.

In an email to Navy Times, Lt. Cmdr. Justin Henderson said Benson "has never declined or avoided the responsibility that is the burden of command at sea" and remains "accountable for the Fitzgerald and her crew, who remain at the forefront of his thoughts."

