Case Study



**"Never Let a Quiet Watch at Sea Lull You into a False Sense of Security"**

**A little background on what it means to exercise command at sea:**

"Only a seaman realizes to what great extent an entire ship reflects the personality and ability of one individual, her Commanding Officer. To a landsman, this is not understandable, and sometimes it is even difficult for us to comprehend--but it is so!

A ship is a different world in herself, and in consideration of the protracted and distant operations of the fleet units, the Navy must place great power, responsibility and trust in the hands of those leaders chosen for command. In each ship there is one man who, in the hour of emergency or peril at sea, can turn to no other man. There is one who alone is ultimately responsible for the safe navigation, engineering performance, accurate gun firing, and morale of his ship. He is the Commanding Officer. He is the ship!

This is the most difficult and demanding assignment in the Navy. There is not an instant during his tour as Commanding Officer that he can escape the grasp of command responsibility.

This is a duty which most richly deserves the highest time-honored title of the seafaring world--'CAPTAIN.'"

*Captain Joseph Conrad*

**Case Study:**

The weather would be turning bad overnight, but late on a sunny afternoon in gentle seas, the Commanding Officer (the CO) had a fresh cup of coffee in hand and enjoyed what little was left of the day in his designated chair on the bridge. It was an older ship, but she could still perform in an award-winning way, even if she could not land helicopters like the newer ones. They had just secured a helicopter from "flight quarters." The aircraft carrier had delivered the mail and some repair parts by lowering them by winch while still flying over the stern. The coffee was good, and all was well on board.

Most of the planned work for the day had been accomplished as well, and crewmembers not on watch had some time for themselves. A young seaman was getting his physical fitness training by lifting free weights with friends. Unexpectedly, the restraining collar on the barbell came loose and the weights on that end fell off--the heavy end came straight down on the seaman's foot and broke some bones. After a quick check by Doc, a senior enlisted Hospital Corpsman, it was clear that the seaman needed a medical evacuation to the aircraft carrier, where higher levels of diagnosis and care were available. The CO would surely not be pleased!

Only the helicopter flight crew was certified to fly after dark, and twilight was coming soon. The seaman's needs were beyond the capability of the medical staff on board. No further helicopter operations were scheduled for the day. The aircraft carrier was a significant flying time away, and it was unclear whether an unscheduled mission could be completed before dark. The weather conditions would be too bad for flying tomorrow--probably the next day as well. If the flight was to happen, the CO would need to arrange it with the Carrier Air Group Commander right away.

Meanwhile, the injured seaman was in much pain and in significant need of care. He had never flown in a helicopter and was afraid of flying. He had not received the training for being hoisted from the deck into a flying helicopter or training in emergency egress procedures, and the broken bones in his foot were causing lots of pain anyway.

A decision was needed, and there was little time to make it. If the medical evacuation mission were to be conducted, the conditions were less than great. Good advice was to be had from the Corpsman and others in the command, but the final assessment of the risks involved and the decision of what to do would rest with the CO alone. There was nothing else to be done on the ship for the injured seaman except to sedate him.

And the sun was getting lower in the sky . . . quickly.