

## THE NAVY'S "RECORD" IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR<sup>1</sup>

ON FEBRUARY 20, 1814, the U. S. frigate *Constitution*, forty-four guns, Captain Stewart, out of Boston, captured the two British ships-of-war *Cyane*, thirty-four guns, and *Levant*, twenty guns, after a spectacular action of four hours beginning at 6 o'clock in the evening.

According to the account by Dudley W. Knox, the engagement began with the *Constitution* to windward and abreast of the *Cyane*, which was leading her consort. After fifteen minutes in the smoke and gathering darkness, the *Levant* attempted to rake the *Constitution* by luffing under her stern, but the maneuver being detected by Capt. Stewart, he quickly braced the *Constitution's* after sails aback, which drew the ship astern and turned her broadside to the little *Levant* while the *Cyane* forged ahead out of action. In subsequent brilliant maneuvers Stewart succeeded in raking the *Levant* twice and the *Cyane* once. The latter struck at just before 7 o'clock, and while a prize crew was being sent on board her, the *Levant* escaped. When the *Constitution* went in chase, however, the little ship was met returning, and was not finally captured until 10 o'clock after a second chase.

The *Constitution* at that time had been in service eighteen years. If an inventory had been prepared of her paperwork and records before she went into that action, it would have shown a volume of material filling two modern file drawers. It included an order book; journals or logs of the captain, lieutenant, sailing master, surgeon, and midshipmen; inventories of the stores and supplies charged to the several departments or officers aboard; several ledgers of expenses; a sheaf of charts; a metal bound signal book, several handsfull of letters and receipts; some payrolls; and a muster roll.

In a midnight battle, October 11, 1942, off Guadalcanal, the U. S. light cruiser *Boise*, ten thousand tons, a complement of something more than one thousand officers and men, Captain E. J. (Mike) Moran, added another brilliant chapter to the history of the U. S. Navy. In only twenty-seven minutes of action, the *Boise* aided by other ships in the American force sank two Jap heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, and three destroyers.

<sup>1</sup> An address given March 24, 1945, at the Statler Hotel, Washington, D.C., under the sponsorship of the Social Science Research Council.

Less than one half hour before midnight, a lieutenant, manning the main battery director above the bridge, had been peering into black space for more than five hours before he could report what seemed to be five targets. Captain Moran replied, "Pick out the biggest one and commence firing."

The first salvo of the *Boise's* fifteen six-inch guns was a direct hit. Target number one ablaze revealed herself as a Jap heavy cruiser, mounting eight-inch guns in comparison to the *Boise's* sixes. In four minutes the Jap turned turtle and skin.

Target number two, a Jap destroyer, broke in two and sank under the fire of the *Boise's* secondary battery of five-inch guns. Target number three, also a destroyer, caught both batteries of the *Boise* and they were too much for her thin shell.

Target number four caused trouble. She was a Jap heavy cruiser, some distance ahead on the *Boise's* starboard bow. While the *Boise* poured shells into her, she herself found the range of the *Boise*. An eight-inch shell tore through the *Boise's* starboard side, just above the waterline and exploded in the crew's mess hall, starting fires. Two lighter shells, probably five-inch, hit the superstructure and two more exploded in the captain's cabin, setting it afire. Soon after the *Boise* and her sister ships had sunk target number four, the *Boise's* fires were brought under control.

Target number five, a destroyer, was already blazing when the *Boise* opened up on her and she sank in two minutes. There followed a brief respite during which the *Boise* by skillful handling succeeded in dodging two torpedoes.

Just as the *Boise's* first salvos struck home on a cruiser for target number six, still another Jap ship, a heavy cruiser with eight-inch guns, singled out the *Boise* and found the range. A shell exploded just forward of the *Boise's* sick bay. There was a terrific explosion on the fo'c'sle and a fire broke out in the forward magazine. A shell had entered nine feet below the waterline. There were direct hits on turrets one and three. Flames from the fo'c'sle fire leapt fifty feet in the air. The *Boise* still maintaining a fair speed, but down at the bow and listing to starboard as the ocean poured in her gaping holes, swerved out of line to the left, turning the six-inch guns of her after turrets on the Jap, and with the aid of guns of the American heavy cruiser closing in the gap left by the *Boise*, sank target number six for the night,

The American force commander, who I believe was Rear Admiral Norman Scott, watched the *Boise* pull out of line, her entire bow aflame, and gave her up for lost. By twenty minutes of three, however, the *Boise's* weakened bulkheads were shored with great timbers, her holes were stuffed with mattresses, her pumps were keeping pace with the water flooding her compartments, her fires were under control, and she could still make twenty knots an hour. Rendezvousing with the rest of the American force just before dawn, there was a ghost-like quality to the fact that she was afloat at all.

The *Boise* at that time had been in service four years. An inventory of her paperwork and records shows a volume of material filling two hundred and forty file drawers. Without attempting to repeat here an inventory which we have made of this substantial volume of material, one group of items is illustrative. Where the *Constitution* got by with a half a drawer of personnel records, the executive officer of the *Boise*, who handles all personnel matters, requires thirty file drawers and some cabinets.

The *Boise* as compared to the *Constitution* had six times the tonnage, two times the personnel, and one hundred and twenty-two times the volume of records.

For our purposes, two important facts are apparent in this comparison:

1. Increase in paperwork and records aboard fighting ships of the Navy in the past one hundred and twenty-five years greatly exceeds the increase in the size and personnel of those ships.

2. As great as is the increase in paper work and records aboard fighting ships it has by no means assumed the monstrous proportions of the paperwork and records in the procurement and supply activities serving those ships. It is the procurement and supply activities which are comparable to civil or public administrative agencies as a whole.

Government bureaus and offices including the military services of supply have increased their paperwork and volume of records many thousands of times since 1812, one of the years in our analogy. It is the pressure of these kindred agencies which has forced most of the increase in paperwork and records aboard ships of the fleet.

Proof of this fact is an interesting experience of the Navy in 1942. There is no military secret, although there may be an element of understatement, in the report that Admiral of the Fleet Ernest J.

King is a stern officer. Shortly after Pearl Harbor he passed the blunt word to civilian heads of the Navy Department that he would not have men aboard ship manning a gun with one hand and a typewriter with the other. Characteristically, he followed this up with an unqualified order to the entire U. S. Fleet that exactly one-half of all their typewriters be put ashore.

At first the department was caught flat-footed, convinced that paperwork could not be eliminated by fiat or other arbitrary action. The department's situation at that time was not unlike that of a gunner's mate of the Navy visiting home on a short leave. His wife, going to the store, left him stretched out luxuriously on a couch in their combination kitchen and living quarters. Their pet cat was curled comfortably atop his chest. Before leaving, his wife cautioned him severely not to doze off and let the roast in the oven burn. His wife returning several hours later opened the door of a smoke filled kitchen and cried out in anger. The gunner's mate of course had drowsed off, but was subconsciously aware that he was sleeping at his post. At the cry of his wife he was jarred awake, sprang to his feet, clutching the cat, pulled open the oven door, rammed in the cat, slammed the door and reported "Number 1 gun ready, sir!"

After the initial shock of Admiral King's order in 1942, the department had a more happy experience than the gunner's mate of our story, also a more happy experience than his wife, the cat, and the roast of our story. Drawing upon some of the best management engineering brains in the country, which had only recently been added to its staff, the Navy produced a surprisingly simple and effective program. The simplest and clearest possible questionnaire was distributed. On it were two questions: (1) What forms and reports do you fill out and forward which you feel could be eliminated? (2) What forms and reports do you receive which you feel could be eliminated? When all of the replies were in by a pre-determined deadline, it was readily found that both senders and receivers agreed that one thousand thirty-six reports or forms could be eliminated or substantially modified. This was done forthwith. A follow-up on this campaign in July, 1944, discontinued or modified an additional two hundred and twelve reports or forms. For example, all ships of the fleet had been required to send in reports of people who boarded them. This was discontinued. Three other reports discontinued were: "Special monthly report of sparkplugs over-

hauled," "Semi-annual report of sparkplugs rejected," and "Semi-annual reports of sparkplugs." Activities throughout the Navy had been burdened by those three.

There is abundant evidence that the relative success of fighting ships in comparison to purely administrative agencies in fighting off paperwork can be credited to absolute adherence of ships of the Navy to what have become fundamental principles of management.

Sticking to our analogy of the *Constitution* and the *Boise*, there was and is no doubt whatsoever as to (1) the functions of those ships, (2) the purpose of their mission, (3) the responsibility of their skippers, and (4) it was clear as the sky that in the conduct of their operations the skippers were immediately accountable to a desperately alert enemy and ultimately accountable through their superior officers to the nation.

Within the organization of each of those ships, as in all ships of the Navy, these same four characteristics govern in the clean delegation of authority and responsibility to heads of departments and in turn from heads of departments to their subordinates.

This is splendidly illustrated by the crew of the *Boise*. The men at the director stations on the starboard side had their backs to the enemy and were on the alert for whatever if anything might come off the *Boise's* port side. During all but the last few seconds of the furious action that night, the Jap fleet blasted away at the backs of their necks. Not once, according to the skipper, did they relinquish their watch to look around at the enemy either through fear or curiosity. This paid off. The Jap heavy cruiser that finally forced the *Boise* to swerve out of line and retire came in on the *Boise's* port side which was the lookout of these men.

Contrast this general picture with (1) the size, complexity, duplication and confusion in administrative agencies, bureaus, and offices and (2) the monstrous mass of paperwork and records, recently estimated to be eighteen million cubic feet or twelve million file drawers, in those administrative agencies, bureaus, and offices. An appreciable part of this mass of paperwork and records results of course from the sheer size of essential governmental operations. But the remainder and very probably the majority of paperwork and records are by-products of inefficient performance of essential functions or unessential duplication or overlapping of functions.

This leaves us with a two-fold problem. The first is easy of accomplishment and highly profitable in any governmental activity. That is to bring the creation, handling, and retirement of papers and files within the sphere of sound principles of management. The second problem is less easy of accomplishment but much more highly profitable. That is to search out, expose, and do all at our command to eliminate unnecessary, overlapping, or duplicated functions.

Methods of solving both these problems are myriad, many of them requiring drudgery of the worst kind, but the results are worthwhile and often spectacular. At the outbreak of the War of 1812 the *Constitution* hurried out of Chesapeake Bay to escape the British blockade and join other ships in the meager American Navy anchored in New York Harbor. Off New York she found herself just within range of the whole British fleet, including ships much heavier gunned than the *Constitution*. Moreover, there was a dead calm at sea that day. All the ships being sailing vessels there was apparently nothing left for the *Constitution* to do but to break up like a clay pigeon under the enemy's guns. But the skipper of the *Constitution* had different ideas. He put a boat over the side just after dawn, let down his anchor into the boat, had the boat row away from the British, and drop anchor. Pulling on the anchor, kedging as it was called in those days, drew the *Constitution* away from the British. Kedging from sunrise to sunset was fierce drudgery but it worked and the *Constitution* escaped.

Noteworthy strides through drudgery and otherwise have been made in recent years by the Navy, War, and other departments in applying accepted principles of effective management to the creation, handling, and retirement of papers and files.

This progress is available in articles and addresses by representatives of the offices immediately responsible for these programs and will not be enumerated here.<sup>2</sup> It is specially encouraging that the Bureau of the Budget has seen fit in recently published pamphlets to lend its support to certain phases of these programs.<sup>3</sup> Such programs

<sup>2</sup> Refer to Navy Department, Office of the Director of Records Administration; Records Management Branch, A.G.O., War Department; Records Management Section, Communications Division, U. S. Department of Agriculture; Records Section, Management Services Branch, Office of Budget and Planning, Office of Price Administration; and the Records Section, U. S. Maritime Commission and War Shipping Administration.

<sup>3</sup> Particularly significant is a development since the date of this address. The Bureau of the Budget has established a position of Records Officer within its own organization. Furthermore the bureau has shown noteworthy discrimination in appointing the former treasury archivist, Miss Helen Chatfield, to this new and important position.

should continue and it is in the public interest that similar programs be undertaken by all agencies of the federal government.

The larger problem, more difficult of accomplishment, is within the sphere of administrative management. It's not news to students of administration that through the centuries, the military have adhered most closely to clean lines of authority, clear cut delegation of responsibility, and rigid accountability for performance. It is not new that lack of these qualities, in whole or in part, are the curse of administrative agencies, bureaus, and offices. Even though it is an old story it doesn't cease to be a problem and for our purposes today the biggest problem.

Three examples of our problem at this level come readily to mind:

1. Accountability for public funds.
2. Classification of positions in the civil service.
3. Preservation of records having administrative, historical, or other value.

Concerning the first, one of my sailors with a mobile microfilming unit paid a twenty-five cent toll at a bridge somewhere up North. By the time the sheaf of papers accounting for that twenty-five cent expenditure came to my desk it was evident that fifty to one hundred dollars in clerical effort had been expended on that reimbursement.

The purpose of the General Accounting Office is to insure that money is expended in accordance with the intent of Congress. There is a policy review of the highest kind. The existence of any effective policy review is suspect, however, when an agency is processing and stowing more than a hundred thousand cubic feet of records a month.

Concerning the classification of civil service positions, our second example, the intent of the Classification Act of 1923 was to insure equal pay for equal work.

Here the purpose of the Civil Service Commission would seem to be the prescription of policies for the classification of positions, fixing responsibilities therefor, and holding agencies accountable for conformance. Unfortunately the officials who should be working at this policy level are reviewing individual position classifications. In general the application of the law has resulted in a whole new profession in the public service and a shocking amount of paperwork.

Our third example, the preservation of records having historical, administrative, or other value is a policy properly chargeable to the Congress and to the National Archives. An inseparable part of this



responsibility is a policy governing what records can and should be disposed of.

Several years ago when the Japanese seized the Yangtze river, a small American gunboat on the upper river was scuttled. The junior officer in command took off her records. He soon found he needed only a small part of them. To destroy the balance at that time he was required to obtain the permission of the Secretary of the Navy, the National Archives, and Congress. This he did by mail over the Burma road and half way round the world.

This particular procedure, thanks to the co-operativeness of the present archivist of the United States, has been greatly simplified in the last few years. It still is neither appropriate nor effective for a committee of the Congress of the United States to be passing in detail on every group of records a federal activity, no matter how humble, may propose for disposal.

Obviously it is a delicate matter to recommend to a Congressional committee that it cease to function. My Irish forebears would turn over in their graves if I were to propose anything so politically futile. Instead, I would recommend that the Congressional committee be reconstituted as a Committee on the Public Records with large scale policy-determining responsibilities. Incidentally, the point would be made that such a committee could not and should not be distracted by the routine of reviewing lists of useless papers.

A Scotsman friend of mine maintains that a man is truly drunk when he slips to the earth and clings to the grass to keep from being flung off the world. A public servant or a public agency discloses an irresponsibility approximating that of a drunkard when he or it slips limpwise into a routine and clutches at a mass of records and a questionable handling of papers to keep from being flung out of a job.

These are random illustrations of objectives we have at the management level in clarifying lines of authority, increasing clear cut delegation of authority, and tightening up accountability for performance. It remains for those in records management programs, administrative management staffs, organizations such as the Interagency Records Administration Conference, Federal Personnel Council, Society for Public Administration, Society for Advancement of Management, and other interested parties to continue to pool their talents and influence in pursuit of such objectives.

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