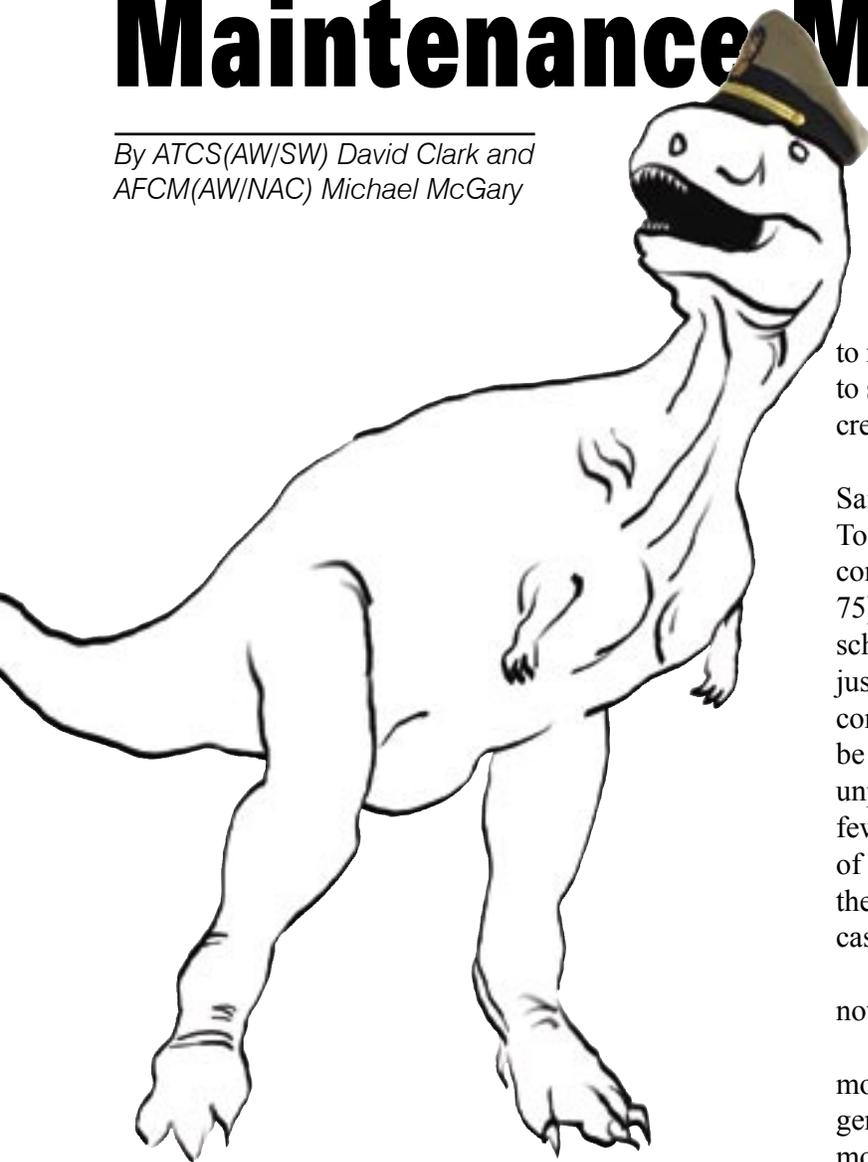


Maintenance Minutes: **Dinosaur**

By ATCS(AW/SW) David Clark and
AFCM(AW/NAC) Michael McGary



Ok, we will admit it. We are dinosaurs. We have done it the same way for so many years that it works for us and has become part of who we are in the Navy. One statement holds true for most Sailors: We are reluctant to change. So, when the new Fleet Response or Readiness Plan was introduced, we were, to say the least, a bit reluctant to take it on board. Its high-tempo pace is an aggressive and energetic collaboration to prepare the strike group for any contingency operation or fleet requirement. These dinosaur bones shook with both fear of the unknown and concern that the normal or routine business structure was being shattered.

One of our biggest concerns was the immediate ramping up right out of the yards. We didn't have an opportunity to learn to walk before we were being asked

to run. And after being asked to run, we were expected to sprint. This pace was extremely fast in training a new crew, so safety was foremost on our minds.

Why the big push to change it all and possibly put Sailors at risk of injury or create a mishap on board? To paraphrase RDML Michael Groothusen, former commanding officer of USS *Harry S. Truman* (CVN-75), "...terrorists love predictability, and those past schedules of the battle group and carrier fleet provided just that. They knew when we were going to the yards, coming out for sea trials, and when we were going to be on cruise. The war on terror has to be a new and unpredictable plan." The events on 9-11 taught us a few lessons in sitting flat-footed and the slow response of getting a carrier to a vital spot on the other side of the world, let alone just up the East Coast, as was the case on that fateful day.

Being predictable and doing it the same way was not going to work anymore.

Gone were the days of TSTA I and II and the months of advanced phase and refresher training, with general-quarters drills until we couldn't take it any more. Gone were the rigid schedules of when ships would be in port or out to sea. Some of the schedule appeared to have been made up along the way. This off-the-cuff or secretive schedule planning was grating on these dinosaur nerves. The greatest concern came from doing exercises and drills only once or twice.

Our safety and comfort factor again was being disrupted and shaken. How can we justify doing an evolution or exercise only once, twice or three times? Is that sufficient practice for junior Sailors to ensure they safely and adequately can perform the tasks during real-world situations such as general-quarters or flight-deck operations?

The answer is yes. But, we had to step back and analyze our methods of training and problem drill sets and get away from the repetitive format of old. We had to make the training realistic and incorporate all facets

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of real-world scenarios; we had to make them outlandish and far-reaching. We had to lean out the ship's schedule to incorporate as much training and practice as possible during underway and in-port periods. Why? Because the new threat does not play by the old rules; they don't have rules.

While reluctant to change, we are becoming believers that change can be good. With the world changing, we have to change our ways or be left behind. We will be the first to admit that our initial fears were unfounded. We had to learn to think outside of our comfort box and come up with innovative ways to succeed. With that change has come a greater need to use every tool in our leadership toolbox: Operational Risk Management (ORM), Ground-Crew Coordination (GCC), the milestones program, and all safety-related instructions and directives.

The unknowns of the new operational commitments were many, and ORM assisted us in minimizing or eliminating the hazards. ORM was incorporated into the day-to-day planning and execution of virtually every evolution. Planning meetings and brainstorming sessions by all parties in the chain of command produced the best results. All parties knew the risks and chances of failure at every stage of an evolution. Using maximum communication, we eliminated the "I wasn't aware" factor. Program managers, supervisors, CDIs, QARs and CPOs were a dominant necessity throughout.

The ship's chief engineer instituted a work-coordination package so all departments could provide inputs that impact the ship's operation or another department's evolution. The package was built to prevent overlapping operations from affecting or delaying another. These evolutions include on-loads, test-bench and equipment installs, power-distribution inspections, technical-representative training and qualification programs, reactor testing, food-and-perishable on-loads, test-cell operations, and even our full safety survey by

the Naval Safety Center. That program, along with the others mentioned, is still in place and being utilized. It's a change that works.

Terrorists don't like it when we know more than they do and are prepared for anything.

How did we fare? During the yard period, initial work-ups, and Summer Pulse 2004 exercise, we had 489 mishaps or injuries, compared to 541 mishaps, or about a 10 percent decrease in overall mishaps since the previous work-up cycle. Although the FRP at-sea time is shorter, the pace definitely is faster, making us prone to a safety-related incident.

So, why, were we safer during the new FRP? We believe our increased awareness and implementation of guiding ORM principles and other tools made the difference. Our focus is on safety and making the ship and its crew battle-ready. We know we may go into a hostile situation, but all the advance homework and preparation is going to make it a smooth and safer situation. We are ready, trained and prepared to do what is necessary.

The FRP schedule doesn't allow for looking in the rearview mirror—only peering into, and preparing for, the unknown future. With cruise just around the corner, the ship and crew are ready and are better prepared than under the old, redundant training and work-up cycle. The use of ORM, GCC, milestones program, and good leadership has gotten us here. The dinosaurs are convinced! Be safe! 

AFCM McGary is the maintenance master chief of AIMD, USS *Harry S. Truman* (CVN-75), and ATCS Clark is the production-control LCPO of AIMD, USS *Harry S. Truman* (CVN-75).

Simply put, the Navy is currently undergoing a "paradigm shift," and you no longer can rely upon "the way we have always done it" to get the job done. New threats and a new focus requires everyone to be flexible and willing to adapt, but, without visible leadership support of new policies and procedures, we will not achieve our goals.—Ed.