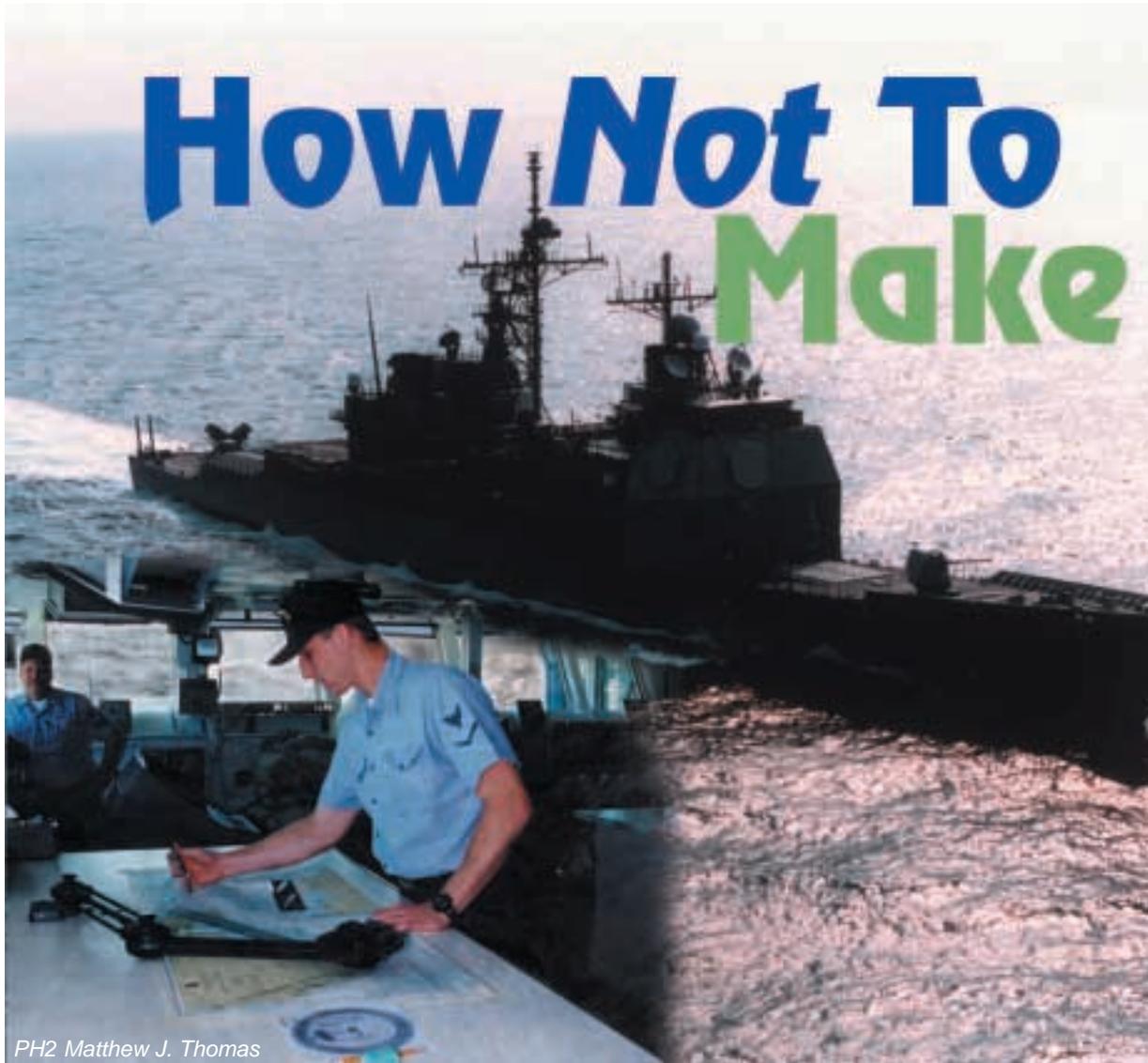


After months of steaming a ship within spitting distance of shoal water, a navigator relaxed a little too much when he saw deep water.

Inset: A quartermaster plots a ship's route. In the case of this author, he had his chief plot the safest and fastest route to the alternate port.



PH2 Matthew J. Thomas

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I couldn't help thinking, "If only I had checked our LogReq message again, I probably would have noticed that the line for fuel requirement was missing." *[For those unfamiliar with "LogReq," it stands for logistics requirements.—Ed.]* Because of my mistake, we had to alter course to port, pass between the island of Tasmania and the mainland of Australia, and proceed up the coast to Sydney, instead of Hobart.

Although I always had longed to visit beautiful Sydney, I never had wanted it to happen this way. "What if I had missed a navigational-information request?" I wandered. "A mistake like that could have put our ship right on top of shoal

water, and I would have been in an even bigger mess."

Here's how my problems started. We had steamed around for three months within spitting distance of shoal water, which had given me nightmares about a long, green table, with no ashtrays at my end. As the ship's navigator, I needed something to relax me. I got the perfect remedy when I spotted a big, blue ocean, with thousands of feet between the keel and a new job.

Unfortunately, this "breather" made me forget an important lesson from my navigational training: Too much relaxation can cause hiccups in safe navigation. When attention to detail slips a little and you become comfortable, the



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results can range from danger to embarrassment.

Until this point in our deployment, I always had paid close attention each time I did a LogReq message for our port visits. I had a copy of the rules¹ about logistics requirements in the left side of my folder and a rough copy of the message on the right for chop by all department heads, the XO, and the CO. Once I completed the scavenger hunt for these signatures, I finalized the draft and printed a smooth copy for the CO's review and release.

This process broke down when I did our ship's LogReq for Hobart. My first mistake was not printing a finalized copy of the message and routing it to the department heads one more time for corrections or additions. "They've all verified the message for completeness," I reasoned. Once I had the CO's release, I went to radio and had the message transmit-

ted—without noticing that one line was missing.

After our arrival in Perth, the port before Hobart, I had learned we would run into heavy weather en route to Hobart. The engineer officer asked me if it would be possible to increase the fuel requirement for Hobart to 310K gallons of DFM. During a phone call to our liaison, I learned that the increased requirement would be "no problem." I then made mistake No. 2: I didn't send out a supplemental LogReq. "After all, I had just talked to the person on the phone," I thought. "Why go through that fun-filled process of routing another message, right?"

Wrong!

As we expected, swells increased 8 to 10 feet en route to Hobart. The ship had to speed up slightly to maintain the position-of-intended-movement (PIM) track speed, which made me

glad I had talked to our liaison about the extra fuel.

Halfway across the Great Bight and pointed toward Tasmania, we received a call on InMarSat: "There will not be enough DFM for both ships. Can you take a lesser-grade fuel?" Accepting this proposal would mean the fuel would have to be delivered by trucks and gravity-fed into the ship, a procedure that's so slow it would tie up engineers for the entire in-port period.

At this point, the liaison mentioned that our initial fuel requirement hadn't been placed on the LogReq message. The CO immediately pulled out his copy, and, sure enough, the line was missing. That's when the you-know-what hit the fan. My first indication that something was wrong was when I heard, "Navigator, Combat" come over the 1MC. That order is second only to "Navigator, Bridge" as the words a navigator dreads most aboard a Navy ship.

After several minutes of "attitude adjustment," I heard the frigate's CO, with whom we were traveling, ask about his fuel. The liaison replied, "None; there is no DFM in Hobart. Can you take a lower grade?"

As both ships altered course toward Sydney, I had my QMC prepare new charts for this deviation from the original plan. "Plot the safest and fastest route," I told him—now that I had "refocused" my attention.

The LogReq often is overlooked until it's time to head overseas. That's a mistake, especially in foreign ports, where methods of shiphandling are different. Yes, it's paperwork, but it's essential for safe navigation. It's a perfect topic for officer training, and I recommend you cover it at least once a year.

Since that incident, I've always made it a point to check every line in a LogReq. When there are no requirements, I write "none required." It takes a few more minutes, but it's better than calling Commander Seventh Fleet for a divert. *The author was assigned to the Naval Safety Center when he wrote this article.*

For More Info...



¹The rules about logistics requirements are contained in NWP 10-1-10, Chapter 7 (Logistics Requirements).