



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

IN THE NEWS

How high-tech Navy went off course on basic seamanship skills

October 4, 2017 *Stars and Stripes*

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Related Experts: Jan van Tol, Peter Haynes

Complacency, however, can bedevil even the most skilled mariner, even when operations tempo is as high as it is for forward-deployed ships of the 7th Fleet in the Pacific, said Peter Haynes, a former Navy captain who retired in 2016 and is a fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, a Washington-based think tank.

“Even when your op-tempo is high like that, you tend to get complacent and — not necessarily take risks — but you don’t necessarily prepare yourself mentally for what’s out there,” he said.

“In these cases, I think complacency could be an issue that needs to be addressed systemically. What are we doing wrong with the watch teams? Are their jobs elsewhere taking up so much of their time and effort that when actually on watch they don’t have the energy needed?”

Jan van Tol, who retired as a captain from the Navy in 2007 after a career that included command of three warships, witnessed high-tech navigational devices supplant the old-fashioned maneuvering board, a paper and pencil system for plotting the relative motion of two ships to predict possible collision points...

But van Tol, a senior fellow at CSBA, laments the passing of the low-tech maneuvering boards because they “helped internalize your feeling for relative motion, which is absolutely key to avoiding collisions.”

Automated charts can lead to complacency in watch standers.

“They may just think, ‘Yeah, the machine is going to take care of it so we don’t need to be as alert,?’” van Tol said.