

“The Norfolk Incident, Part 2”  
(A True Account)  
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The following document has been reformatted from its original version and partially edited.

As we exited the mouth of Chesapeake Bay Norfolk VA, we passed the point of demarcation, which meant we were now in international waterways.

It was a beautifully peaceful day and we expected to have fair weather all the way up the east coast to Annapolis, MD, where we were to be the Navy's representative ship at the Navy/Rice football game.

Prior to getting underway, the skipper had announced that we would be having a General Quarters drill as soon as we passed the demarcation line.

This would not be a full 4-hour General Quarters exercise, but instead we would stand down as soon all battle stations checked in to the bridge as being "Manned and Ready." It seemed simple enough, but events would soon prove to become more serious than first expected.

As General Quarters was called, I took up my new position as Fire Control Officer on the bridge next to the skipper. Everyone on the bridge waited for the crew to get to their battle stations and report in as "Manned and ready."

After a few minutes into the drill, I happened to glance out the bridge window near the port (left) bridge wing and I observed a small pleasure cruiser approximately 2000 yards away approaching our port beam. She was still one mile away and seemed to be no threat to our current course, but I did mention it to the skipper, who in turn ordered the XO to hail the ship by radio and warn them that they were approaching a US Warship and to turn away.

The XO did as ordered but the small boat, which was approaching us at a high rate of speed did not respond and again the XO hailed them over the ships radio.

The small boat was now at 1500 yards and closing fast, so the skipper gave orders to increase our weapons readiness status from code white to code yellow, which meant for all weapons to bare down on the suspected target and to have live ammunition on standby (ammo canisters open).

At this point, it seemed to be a good opportunity to harmlessly exercise our weapons readiness, seeing that we were already at General Quarters. But as I gazed at the small pleasure craft with my binoculars, I could see the rooster tail (wake) shooting up from the aft propellers as she raced through the water while approaching us at an alarming speed.

The skipper again ordered the XO to hail the boat with a warning that they were approaching a US Warship, conducting exercises, and if she failed to change course she would be in danger of being fired upon. The stark memory of the *USS Cole* incident was a lesson learned by the Navy one year before.

The fast boat was now less than 1000 yards and closing fast when the skipper ordered all weapons to increase their readiness status to code orange (ammunition loaded but weapons on safe).

As Fire Control Officer, I knew, very well that if the next readiness level (code red) were to be ordered, the control and command of all the ships weapons would be handed over to me, awaiting final orders from the skipper to release all batteries (fire all weapons).

Nowhere in my wildest dreams would I ever expect such a thing to happen. Surely this pleasure craft would heed the warning and turn away. We were in the USA for heavens sake. We don't shoot private pleasure crafts out of the water. DO WE?

My mind was racing and my heart was thumping hard. Everyone on the bridge had their eyes or binoculars trained on the fast boat quickly approaching our port beam. The craft was now less than 500 yards and closing with, what seemed to be, no intention of waving off.

Matters were quickly becoming desperate. Just a few minutes before, the ship and crew were eagerly anticipating R&R (Rest and Relaxation) at our destination port, Annapolis, MD. Now, we had been suddenly catapulted into an anxious and deadly game of standoff with a seemingly unarmed civilian pleasure craft.

I struggled to maintain my thoughts between what seemed a surrealistic dream and yet was indeed, cutting reality. In less than a minute, we are about to fire upon a potential, but real threat to our lives and safety. And the craziness of it all; we were in peaceful waters.

Suddenly, as the target (it indeed was now a target) bared down on our port side with a distance of 100 yards and closing fast, the skipper raised the weapons readiness to code red (locked and

loaded, safety's off). I was now in command of all the ships weapons, awaiting orders to release all batteries, on the pleasure craft approaching us.

As suddenly as the skipper raised the weapons readiness he also ordered the XO to quickly broadcast a last warning over the ship's loud speakers. It was a desperate race of time. In less than 30 seconds we were about to shoot this ship and the people onboard, into oblivion.

As the fast-boat approached less than 75 yards, the XO called out "Small boat approaching fast on our port side!" "You are approaching a US Warship! Turn away NOW or YOU WILL BE FIRED UPON!"

My heart had jumped into my throat by now, because I knew the next words out of the skipper's mouth would be "Release all Batteries!" But as soon as the XO's warning was announced over the loud speakers, the small craft turned immediately to their starboard (right) and quickly opened range from us.

We could see the vacationers onboard looking at us in horror as they soon realized that their frivolous sightseeing venture had become a serious breach of protocol which almost cost them their lives. It was obvious that they had not been monitoring their radio.

Yes, it had all been a thoughtless prank to see how close they could get to a Navy ship, never considering the tragedy of the *USS Cole* incident and the deadly consequences of their venture.

As we watched the frightened tourists race away from us, we all looked at each other as if to say,  
“Can you believe what just happened? What else could be said except a thankful prayer?”

I can't help but reflect on that day and think that it was just another day in history, but again,  
NOT in the history books.

True story.