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Harbor Protection Project
Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut

Technical Memorandum No. 10
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Harbor Defense Units
by
L. W. McKeehan

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Harbor Defense Units

L. W. McKeehan

1. It appears to be current doctrine in the USN that a Harbor Defense Unit is responsible only for the effective use of fixed harbor defense equipment, including controlled mines, in its assigned area. It is obviously assumed that knowledge of the capabilities of standard equipment of this kind, plus information readily obtainable in the area, will permit planning of suitable installations by naval district officers, guided by sea frontier officers, so that the whole responsibility of the Officer-in-Charge of a Harbor Defense Unit is with respect to the readiness of material and of personnel to make, maintain and operate fixed and relatively conventional installations. No more active or flexible kind of harbor defense is his concern. It is suggested that this doctrine requires revision.
2. The junior rank of present Officers in Charge of HDU's, and their frequent transfers to new areas or to new duties make it unrealistic to suppose that they can, in fact, learn much about their harbors or contribute much to planning their over-all defenses. This is especially obvious with respect to planning for mine countermeasures as an integral part of harbor defense, the responsibility for mine countermeasures being presently scattered between commands afloat and ashore. Success in this part of

mine warfare requires combinations of training and experience relatively hard to find in one person.

3. It is believed that great economy of means, in the military sense, would result from a change in doctrine with respect to Harbor Defense Units which would emphasize their important standby function, now taken for granted (contrary to fact), in obtaining pertinent local data for sound planning of harbor defenses of all kinds and in otherwise assisting such planning.

4. It is suggested that the primary peace-time responsibility of each HDU should be the collection in an assigned area of precise data upon which harbor defense planning may be based. Such data includes details of hydrography, topography, meteorology and man-made structures and practices which affect the functions of that harbor under plausible types and amounts of enemy attack. Local collection and evaluation of these data would permit district and frontier staffs to recommend proper deployment of naval vessels, personnel and equipment and proper cooperation by other armed forces in meeting any type of emergency, as well as in maintaining a reasonable state of readiness during relatively peaceful conditions.

5. In order to effectuate the new doctrine, each important HDU would have to be furnished with items of equipment, including

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boats, which are now hardly available at all, and which are in such short supply that the collection of probably useful data and the relocation or reconditioning of channels and approaches which such data make advisable will take many years unless greatly accelerated.

6. Consistently with the increase in local responsibility here suggested, the OIC of each important HDU should be a competent and relatively senior officer, not lower in rank than Commander, who is available for a long term of duty at one place, and he should be supported by several junior officers with special training in phases of harbor defense which are found to be important in that area. The OIC should be competent to assume the duties of Harbor Entrance Control Officer at his home station in emergencies, and his juniors should, similarly, be available for command of local operations then required in its defense.

7. The advantage obtainable by previous study of a probable battleground has been frequently noted in military history. The same advantage can and should be obtained in Defense against Mine Warfare (now the most critical part of Harbor Defense) where the battlegrounds are fore-ordained and where, as is not the case at sea or in the air, there is almost no way to select a favorable weapon or position for defense on the spur of the moment.

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It is further suggested that the study should be conducted in a manner which would be expected to have no effect on the morale of the personnel involved. It is not intended to suggest that the study should be conducted for selected officers to begin the corresponding development of harbor defense in selected foreign harbors. Since the officers should not be trained, and the study should be conducted unobtrusively, all need careful study as to the setting up of a study group at the Naval War College is a possibility.

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