



## **Fight, Move, Float – It is time to simplify Command**

By Captain David Landon

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# Tac Talks

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## Introduction

Chief of Navy's cultural intent for the Royal Australian Navy is a Fighting Navy, a Thinking Navy, and an Australian Navy. For the past 15 years, our ship's command teams have sought to refine, clarify and contemporise internal command and control processes and procedures such that by the mid-2000s we had developed a matrix of command priorities constructed to reflect equipment and capability the CO of a ship might need to achieve their aim or mission.



Graduates of General Entry 310 recruit class give a 'General Salute' on the parade ground during their graduation ceremony held at HMAS Cerberus, Victoria. Photographer: LSIS Paul McCallum.

This matrix of systems and capabilities was meant to clarify command intent; and when Operation Relex and Resolute usurped Navy's focus from the late 1990s these complicated matrices and pictographs largely achieved this ("Maritime support operations" = power for davits, surveillance radar, C2 etc. etc.). However, my observation over this period, from operations officer, XO, Sea Trainer and CO is that rarely are these complicated diagrams and matrices beneficial in guiding ships' companies to achieve command intent. This leads me to the belief that they are redundant or at least distracting command teams from the focus of command and leadership in times of crises. If Navy culture can be guided by three core principles, then a ship should be similarly guided. Fight-Move-Float provides the clarity and direction for any ship's company to deliver the effect a CO desires and should be reinstated to replace the complicated pictograph and matrices that represent command priorities in the Fleet today.

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## The Principles of Command

ADDP 00.1 Command and Control, lists the eight principles of Command as:

- a. unity of command
- b. span of command
- c. clarity
- d. redundancy
- e. delegation of command
- f. control of significant resources
- g. obligation to subordinates
- h. accountability.

Each of these principles are important for a command team to develop and a commanding officer to nurture while in command. A commanding officer should consider how the principles of command will be enacted while they are in command. Equally, we should examine the systems established to support command in delivering these key principles and the necessary effect to achieve mission requirements. For our ships at sea, Commanding Officers use command priorities and command intent to provide both unity of command and clarity, presently displayed as a dogmatic framework of systems. I will also review how we can better provide delegation of command and control of significant resources. The present framework used at sea for determining command priorities for a ship's company does not support these key principles of command. The RAN needs to simplify this process. A return to Fight-Move-Float will provide this clarity, unity, redundancy and resource control that is overly complicated at sea today.

## The Submariners Do It Right

The RAN Submarine Force operate sophisticated and complex weapon systems, deployed operationally and isolated from higher command for long periods of time. Commanders have managed to provide these complicated platforms clear command intent (clarity) and purpose (unity) through three command priorities "Safety of the submarine – Remain undetected – Achieve the aim." These, arranged in an order the command requires provides absolute clarity as to function and role for the crew.

Why is it then, that surface combatants cannot do the same? Why is a more complex matrix and graphical display of systems, a better way of commanding a warships activities during conflict, emergency or heightened risk? Would not a more simple construct reinforced with clear command intent provide a better way to control significant resources, give clarity and provide unity of direction for a ship's company? The current framework does not provide greater clarity in periods of heightened risk or activity.



HMAS Sheean arrives in Devonport, Tasmania. Photographer: POIS Andrew Dakin

## Royal Navy or Australian Navy?

A 2007 edition of the Royal Navy's Flag Officer Sea Training's "Best Practice Guide to Battle Damage Repair C2" is almost unashamedly repeated verbatim by the RAN's ANP2702- Royal Australian Navy Shipboard Combat Survivability publication. There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is the reliance on the Royal Navy for their battle damage experience in the

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development of procedures and doctrine following the Falklands War in 1982. However, since then, the RAN has evolved as an independent and professional Navy in its own right, and we continue to evolve culturally as an Australian Navy. I have almost four years' experience as a sea trainer in the RAN, observing collective training at sea, across several different Navies (contemporary and regional) and I believe the RAN is ready to move away from the RN and think for ourselves as a Fighting Navy, a Thinking Navy, and an Australian Navy. To that end, I offer a small contribution in terms of guidance for ship's Commanding Officers in providing both Command Aims and Command Priorities, that differ from ANP2702 and the RN FOST guide to BDR C2. In part my offering is a more contemporary application of the previous RN and therefore RAN approach to command and control in ship borne emergencies and times of war; Fight – Move – Float.



(l-r) Lieutenant Aviation Warfare Officer Lachlan Murray and Able Seaman Electronics Technician Ethan Jones fight a simulated fire during a Damage Control Exercise onboard HMAS Arunta. Photographer: LSIS Jarrod Mulvihill

## For Consideration

Fight-Move-Float are generally recognised as terms that were used in time of damage control, to direct general efforts to enable the ship to "fight", enable it to "move", or continue the DC effort and not sink (i.e. "float"). Following an emergency a Commanding Officer would provide priorities for the control of resources through those terms. As these morphed into the current framework of system based priorities, the surface fleet moved away from resource control in extremis and toward the need for constant command priorities. This means that at all times a CO is asked to provide two or three priorities for the ship's company to interpret and enact based on what the CO believes are mission critical or priority systems at any point in time. This replaces the time to think, or more precisely reduces the need to think, and limits good command decision making.

Simply, it is not in step with the Principles of Command. It is better to provide clear command intent, reinforced by simple command priorities that provides the necessary clarity for a good

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command team to execute a given mission. The current practice denudes the need for clear command intent; and when changed or revised every time the tactical situation is updated can become unwieldy. In some instances it has removed the needed time and space a command team requires to direct the operational effect. A commanding officer needs to provide clarity in command, and unity in purpose through a clearly stated command intent (a clear statement of what the ship needs to achieve), reinforced through command priorities. This can be scalable, as CN has demonstrated in Plan Pelorus.

If CN can direct the Navy through a clear mission statement reinforced by command priorities or intent, and a submarine CO can achieve a mission through clear mission requirements and three command priorities so can a ship. Fight -Move- Float. Place these three words in the required order after a clear command statement such as; "Take standby station and replenish fuel and stores: priorities are Move, Fight, and Float". Or "Remain in the force and protect Sirius from subsurface threats: Priorities are Fight, Move, and Float". Or, "Reclaim the ship and return to port, priorities are; Float, Move, Fight". Each of these command statements let a ship's company know what the commanding officer wants to achieve and what they prioritise in order of resources needed to achieve the aim.

A statement may also be more general; "Command Aim is to enhance the reputation of the ADF and the RAN, command priorities are Fight – Move – Float". This in turn provides the professional heads of department the latitude to make decisions that best achieve the command aim. This pushes decision making to the appropriate level and empowers subordinates. The current complex matrix and pictograph representation does not provide the flexibility or the delegation of authority needed to articulate what a CO wants to achieve with their highly capable ship and ship's company. They are equally suitable to surface combatants, amphibious afloat support ships, patrol boats and hydrographic survey units; context is the key and the commanding officer can provide this as part of their command intent.

## Counter Point

Proponents of the RN system and matrix / pictograph may argue that the Fight – Move – Float process is overly simplified and does not represent the systems that a CO wants or needs to direct resources effectively. My observation is that a CO rarely has the time nor inclination to ponder the full detail of these pictographic representations of systems. Usually a patrol boat or ship retains two or three of the same priorities.

A surface combatant may use "Build the Tactical Picture – Sprint – Air Warfare" and a Patrol Boat "Build the tactical picture – sprint – MSO". These get moved around on occasion but to the sailor in the passage way, these statements mean little. To the heads of department, who may be dealing with multiple issues, the nuance of what systems are actually required to "build the tactical picture" is rarely fully grasped. Additionally, a ship will almost always need to build the tactical picture as part of a "fight" function. These statements as command priorities are over used and not well understood. Simplification of the statements provides a clarity of command and a necessary delegation of function we have lost.

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Royal Australian Navy patrol boat HMAS Launceston sails off the coast of Christmas Island while she conducts border protection as part of Operation Resolute.

Proponents of the current system may also argue that it provides the necessary priority for the repair of sensors and weapon systems as well as power generation. I would argue that a clear statement from command provides this detail while the priorities of fight-move-float provide clarity as to where the effort is needed. If after sustaining combat damage, a commanding officer of an amphibious ship's command intent or aim is "To remain in location and sustain support to forces ashore, priorities are : Move – Fight – Float" then the command team will work toward ensuring propulsion and navigation systems are restored to the extent the ship can remain in location. The command team will direct resources to ensure weapons and surveillance systems are available to maintain sea shore connection (flight deck, well dock, radars and force protection), and finally that there are sufficient resources from the remaining ship's company not involved in the former to fight the combat damage. These priorities may change as incidents develop but the intent and execution is clear. The CO has provided clarity of intent and unity of purpose.

## Conclusion

The Chief of Navy has provided clear command intent and priorities through Headmark 2022. A Fighting Navy, a Thinking Navy, and Australian Navy give both clarity and unity that is needed to achieve what CN needs our Navy to become. If CN can effectively command a Navy with three clearly articulated priorities then a CO of a ship, patrol boat, submarine, can equally provide clarity and unity as well as control resources and empower delegates with a clear intent and simple priorities. The submariners have retained this proven concept in their operation of complex systems to achieve complicated missions. It is time for the RAN surface force to review and simplify command priorities, in order to provide the necessary latitude that highly trained and professional command teams and ship's companies need to execute command intent. It is time to go back to the future "Fight-Move-Float".

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