

Dawn Patrol in the Med

As dawn breaks early this autumn day
The crew assembles down ASWOC way
To get their brief on targets found
In nearby waters where subs abound
Patrolling seas where they hold sway.

A Victor II Intel folks say
En-route the Med where battle groups play
We study well the AOP
And familiarize current ROE
It's sub hunting we'll perform today.

Three hours standard for preflight
The pilots ensure the weather's right
With systems checked by seasoned men
Hydraulics, fuel and four engines
Ensures the crew safety-of-flight.

The Mission Commander holds his brief
Eight hours we'll search before our relief
Continues the search for the elusive sub
No guarantee of contact, there's the rub
Set Condition 5, orders the chief.

Four turboprops send eerie vibrations
We seek on-top time with anticipation
And as our P3 rolls down the runway
It's Orion's Game we'll play
We achieve rotation, proceed on-station.

Descend onsta, 1000 feet
The TACCO launches buoy BT
To confirm expected MDRs
Will buoy placement be near or far?
Direct Path tactics, cause no CZ.

Pattern deployed, we all now wait
Acoustics will predict our fate
Each man focused on his domain
Sensor One screams, "Contact gained"
"Flight, proceed direct to channel 8".

Doppler-effect suggests CPA
The TACCO updates his tactical display
To select a barrier down the sub's known course
We've confirmed the target by its sound source
The hunter hunts its underwater prey.

The Navcom calls in our position
With details of this prosecution
To the ASWOC briefer still on duty
As we descend to kick some booty
TACCO enters a tracking solution.

At 200 feet, that's where we go
Our purpose is both low and slow
To guarantee the sub's location
With MAD gear we have confirmation
It's a pen-banger, so now we know.

We localized, and now we track
"Flight, line up for a simulated attack"
We'll have one chance, before she goes evasive
On multiple buoys contact pervasive
"Barrier CPAed, and that's a fact"

"Buoy away, feigned MK-46 splash
The target begins a high speed dash
Creates a knuckle, defensive ploy
It launches its underwater decoys
It goes deep and fast within a flash.

Our relief calls on secure UHF
“Can you update us with a sitrep?”
As they descend to 5000 feet
“Do you have contact, I repeat?”
And tell us the buoy’s best depth.

We communicate with our colleagues
After eight hours, we are fatigued
But we’re ecstatic we came and played
And enjoyed the success that we have made
ASW remains a game of intrigue.

Legend

Med - Mediterranean

ASWOC- Anti-Submarine Warfare Operations Center

Victor II – Soviet SSGN (fast attack nuclear submarine) common (1970-1980s) in the Soviet Navy order of battle

AOP - Area of Probability

ROE – Rules of Engagement

Condition 5 – Specific condition for P-3 aircrew during takeoff & landings

P3-C Orion – US Navy’s premier land-based Anti-Submarine Warfare aircraft (1960s-2000) used to conduct ASW missions or Search and Rescue Ops

Onsta- short for on-station. The AOP where a P3 conducts its mission.

BT – short for bathythermograph (a sonobuoy that calculates the water temperature gradient so as to better predict sound detection ranges)

MDR – Median Detection Range – average Direct Path (DP) sound ranges expected in a specific body of water with specific temp/depth/salinity profile.

CZ – short for Convergence Zone – a sound path typically available in very deep waters with a specific acoustic profile (common in the Atlantic but not the Med)

CPA – Closest Point of Approach. Basically, describes the closest distance that the sub achieves relative to a sonobuoy or sonobuoy pattern.

TACCO – short for Tactical Coordinator i.e. the ASW tactician on the crew. This is what my role was in the Navy.

MAD – Magnetic Anomaly Detection. Electronic gear that confirms a sub’s presence when the P3 aircraft overflies the submerged sub. The MAD gear confirms a large submerged metallic presence (such as a submarine).

MK-46 – Designation of a US Navy torpedo carried on P3 aircraft.