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# Fitzgerald Delivers Damage Control Lessons and Questions



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The Navy's line-of-duty report released last week reaffirms that the crew members of the USS *Fitzgerald* (DDG-62) reacted with professionalism, courage, and determination to save their shipmates and contain the flooding resulting from the collision. One Sailor, Fire Controlman 1st Class Gary Leo Rehm Jr., gave his life to ensure everyone still alive was able to evacuate the space. His actions speak to a tradition of unselfishness and a willingness to sacrifice for one's shipmates. Hopefully the Navy will appropriately honor his efforts and hold them up as an example to all Sailors.

The insights and questions offered here for consideration by Navy leadership stem from the report:

- *Damage Control (DC) Training* : DC training was adequate for the casualties experienced, and the crew responded well. To what degree is this scenario indicative of battle damage scenarios? Where differences exist (e.g., no fire or smoke), is DC training sufficient to handle more extensive damage in a combat zone far

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out to sea?

- *Ship or Shipmate ?* Crew members evacuating the flooding Berthing 2 left the port access scuttle open so long in an attempt to save lives that they were unable to fully close it. In this case, it was the right decision. But, it will not always be so. Who determines when a flooding or burning compartment should be isolated to prevent loss of the ship, regardless of the loss of shipmates in that compartment? How can the Navy train its commanding officers and crew members to make such a decision correctly and in time?

- *Evacuation and Treatment of the Wounded :* The Navy lacks the ability to move large numbers of wounded Sailors to adequate treatment facilities. In a mass casualty situation, evacuation by helicopter will be insufficient, and may be impeded by ongoing combat. Wounded Sailors likely will remain on board ship for some time, and the ability to provide doctors will be a critical stop-gap until evacuation is possible. This was the case during World War II. How is the Navy preparing to provide such capability in future combat scenarios?

- *Gear Adrift :* The report states that evacuation of the flooding berthing compartment was hampered by unsecured gear. Furniture, exercise equipment, and lockers should be secure. At the beginning of World War II, ships went to extraordinary lengths to remove flammables and potential missile hazards, even to the point of scraping off interior paint. While it may not yet be time for such extreme measures, the *Fitzgerald*'s collision suggests the need for increased attention in securing equipment meant to make day-to-day lives of sailors at sea more comfortable.

- *People and Equipment :* The *Fitzgerald* requested a rescue-and-assistance (R&A) team from the USS *Dewey* (DDG-105). The R&A team brought people, portable pumps, and hoses. Two key issues arise from this part of the incident: (1) the allocation of three portable and finicky self-powered pumps per ship may be inadequate; (2) DC is human-intensive; people are needed in numbers and for long periods. Sufficient manning for controlling battle damage is an essential element of the fleet's combat viability. These points are worthy of deeper analysis as the Navy considers combat against capable naval opponents.

- *System Isolation :* The report states that progressive flooding was, in part, the result of ruptured fire-main aqueous fire-fighting foam piping. What it does not address is the effectiveness of isolating those ruptures. Careful consideration is needed in looking at the ability of ships of all classes to effectively isolate ruptures as close as possible to the damage. While expense is involved, the cost of additional valves pales in comparison to the cost of a ship, a mission, or unnecessary loss of lives.

In the end, the *Fitzgerald*'s crew members contained extensive damage and brought their ship into port under her own power. The key question remains: How will U.S. Navy ships fare in the face of much more extensive and destructive damage in future naval combat? That question needs to form the backdrop of the lessons-learned analysis in this case.

For more by the same author: [Fitzgerald Proves Damage Control Is Exhausting](#)

Photo caption: Gear adrift in the *Fitzgerald*'s Berthing 2 lounge is in evidence in this photo. U.S. Navy

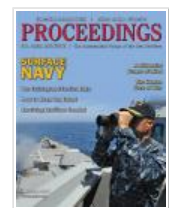
**Captain Roncolato** is an independent consultant and currently is working on DDG-1000 engineering training. He commanded the *Arleigh Burke* -class guided-missile destroyer USS *The Sullivans* (DDG-68) and Destroyer Squadron Twenty-Six.



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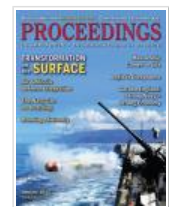
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