

Navy report confirms: civilians distracted crew of US sub

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A confidential Navy report confirms that the presence of civilians on board the USS Greeneville distracted the commander and crew of the nuclear submarine in the period leading up to the February 9 collision between the sub and a Japanese fishing trawler off the Hawaiian coast.

Nine people, including four high school students, were killed when the sub performed an “emergency blow” surfacing maneuver and rammed into the Ehime Maru, which was on a fisheries training mission. A group of 16 civilian guests were on board the Greeneville at the time of the collision, and two of the guests were manning control posts. US Navy officials have admitted that the emergency maneuver was executed to impress the civilians.

Outrage in Japan over the collision, and criticism that the US has been slow to reveal information about the incident, have prompted President George W. Bush to dispatch a senior Navy officer to Tokyo. Adm. William J. Fallon, vice chief of naval operations, was set to arrive Tuesday in Japan, and will hand-deliver a letter of apology from Bush to Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori on Wednesday.

Greeneville Cmdr. Scott D. Waddle released a letter of apology on Sunday that stopped short of admitting responsibility for the accident. The statement read in part: “It is with a heavy heart that I express my most sincere regret to the Japanese people and most importantly, to the families of those lost and injured in the collision.... It is my most sincere desire to determine the truth about what happened.” Cmdr. Waddle has been relieved of his duties pending the outcome of a naval court of inquiry into the collision, which has been postponed until March 5 at the request of a civilian defense lawyer hired by Waddle.

Excerpts of the Navy report of the preliminary

investigation into the accident, conducted by Rear Adm. Charles Griffiths Jr., were provided by a Navy source to the *Washington Times* on Thursday. The report directly cites the presence of the civilian guests for disrupting communication between the Greeneville's commanding officer and a crew member tracking the Japanese vessel. In addition, the report says Adm. Griffiths' findings “suggest a significant departure from the expected level of professionalism and performance of the ship's key watchstanders and senior leadership.”

According to the information provided to the *Washington Times*, Cmdr. Waddle was never advised by a sub technician that the Japanese boat was most likely less than 4,000 yards away from the sub as it prepared for the maneuver. In addition, the submarine's executive officer, Lt. Cmdr. Gerard K. Pfeifer, believed the captain was preparing for the emergency blow too hastily, but “stayed silent because he did not want to challenge his boss in front of the civilian guests.”

As Cmdr. Waddle and the sub's crew prepared for the maneuver, there were reportedly a “significant number” of crew members and civilians crowded together on the periscope stand when Waddle and another officer were attempting to survey for nearby vessels. The Navy report states: “The location and number of civilian visitors did interfere with the ability of the [officer of the deck] and commanding officer to use the fire-control system and converse with the [technician] in ascertaining the contact picture from the time the ship was preparing for periscope depth until the emergency blow was conducted.”

This information directly contradicts public statements of Navy spokesmen and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who have maintained that the presence of civilians on board was not a contributing

factor in the incident. Rumsfeld has temporarily banned civilians from manning the controls of US warships, aircraft and combat vehicles, and the Navy has suspended allowing civilians on board submarines during emergency blows.

Details of the leaked report describe a situation on board the Greenville leading up to the accident in which a series of safety procedures were not properly followed by a captain and crew distracted by the presence of civilians. In particular, the report states that the crew failed to use all the sub's available detection equipment and that they did not properly obtain a sonar reading that could have detected the Ehime Maru's close proximity.

According to the Navy's investigation, the Greenville's crew committed a "fundamental error" by not properly carrying out the Target Motion Analysis (TMA) that would have enabled the fire-control technician to plot the distance of the Ehime Maru's sonar contact. The crew apparently relied upon information from passive sonar, which provides a ship's bearing based on engine or propeller noise, but not distance.

The report also indicates that the periscope search conducted by Cmdr. Waddle and Lt. Michael Coen was inadequate. The sub was at periscope depth for an estimated two minutes, performing scans at 60-foot and then 58-foot depths. "A shallower depth for a better 'high look' was warranted in light of the condition of the seas and the importance of the search," according to the report.

The sub's crew also "unnecessarily" classified a BQR 22 sonar analyzer as malfunctioning, when in fact one of two sonar displays in the control room could have provided the captain with a sonar signal of the Japanese boat. The BQR 22 can provide indication of a contacted vessel's speed. Combined with information from passive sonar, data from the BQR could have estimated the location of the vessel.

The report also points to a "general breakdown in communications between the [commanding officer] and the [fire-control technician]." Just before going to periscope depth, the technician plotted the Ehime Maru at 4,000 yards from the Greenville and moving to 2,000 yards, but did not report this to either Cmdr. Waddle or Lt. Coen.

According to the report: "As a result of the number of

people on the periscope stand between the [commanding officer] and the [technician], and the apparent intention of the commanding officer to rely solely on sonar information, the [technician] did not actively participate in tactical discussion with the commanding officer or officer of the deck." Additionally, the visitors in the control room reportedly blocked the officers' view of a video screen showing the periscope view.



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