



THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY  
WASHINGTON DC 20350-1000

February 7, 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: SECNAV VECTOR 10

This week, as a precursor to a difficult subject, I would like to share with you the story of Operation Pedestal. Operation Pedestal was executed during World War II. A British convoy set sail from England in August of 1942 with the crucial mission of resupplying the island of Malta in the Mediterranean Sea. Malta is a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea that had been used by the Allies to wreak havoc on German and Italian naval forces in order to dislodge them from North Africa and pave the way for the expulsion of Nazi forces from the European continent. The Germans understood that Malta was a critical lynchpin to the Allied war effort and were determined to destroy it. During one month in the summer of 1942, they dropped more ordnance on Malta than on London, throughout the entire duration of the Battle of Britain.

By August of 1942, the conditions in Malta were so bad that food rations had dwindled to less than 6.0 ounces of food per person each day. The island was desperate for resupply so Operation Pedestal was assembled off the Scottish coast. It consisted of 14 supply ships, one of which, the SS OHIO, contained the most vital resource for the island: fuel. The convoy was escorted by the largest escort force of any convoy during the entire war: two battleships, four aircraft carriers, seven cruisers, and no fewer than thirty-two destroyers.

Once the convoy entered the Med, their journey to Malta turned into a massacre. Two of the four aircraft carriers were sunk, along with four cruisers, several destroyers, and 9 of the 14 supply ships that the convoy was tasked with protecting. In addition to the loss of ships and supplies, nearly 1,000 British sailors and merchant marines lost their lives. But one of those supply ships, the one carrying fuel, was still afloat – the SS OHIO. It had been hit multiple times and was sinking until two of the remaining destroyers, also badly damaged, saddled up to her on either side, and at great risk to themselves, tied lines to her to keep her from sinking and safely escorted her into the harbor in Malta. This single act of selflessness, risk, and bravery by the crews of those destroyers has been described by naval historians as one of the most significant acts of heroism of the entire war. It saved the fuel ship, and most importantly its precious cargo, so that Malta could survive and contribute to the ultimate defeat of the Axis powers.

Why am I sharing this story with you in this vector? Because what the crews of those two destroyers did during Operation Pedestal is a perfect metaphor for the character we see, and need, in each of you. Beyond all our world-class ships, weapons systems, and global capabilities, what truly sets our Navy and Marine Corps team apart is each and every unique individual of our team. They come from every part of this country, and they choose to serve, beyond self, with a higher purpose in mind.

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Every time I meet a Sailor, Marine, or Department of the Navy Civilian in our force, I walk away renewed and inspired. The actions you take, whether or not anyone is looking, reflects the pride you take in yourselves, in our mission, and in each other. And your commitment to these ideals inspires the best in others, both in uniform and in the American people who look to you as an example of all that is good in our nation.

However, in every organization, and in every society, there are dysfunctional and destructive behaviors that threaten cohesion and trust, and undermine those honorable traits to which we all aspire. We are no different in that regard, but our pride and commitment convince me that we handle and overcome these issues better than most.

One such issue that unfortunately threatens us is sexual harassment and assault. This week, I was at the University of New Mexico to meet with civilian and academic leaders to share ideas on how to prevent these destructive behaviors. We discussed the importance of peer leadership, and the positive examples we see, particularly among our junior enlisted ranks. We also discussed the collective responsibility we all share to foster a culture that prevents these behaviors, and handle them better when they occur. The determination in the room was inspiring, and the best practices we shared with each other were innovative and enlightening. Everyone agreed that correcting and eliminating these behaviors will be a long journey, and that we are only at the beginning. Still, there was little doubt that the Navy and Marine Corps were setting a strong pace in this process.

The Department's focus on building partnerships across the Department of Defense, academia, and industry, as well as our efforts to focus on sexual harassment and assault prevention and how to best measure the effectiveness of our programs, are vital to effecting needed change. Leveraging the expertise in this arena, we are identifying the latest research and emerging evidence-based tools to address the attitudes, culture, and low-level behaviors that contribute to the prevalence of this intolerable behavior.

Over the past fiscal year, we have organized discussions like the one in New Mexico, building on last year's National Discussion at the United States Naval Academy. We are engaging hundreds of universities and collaborating with leading experts to identify actionable recommendations for measurable change. Each of the Services and every military academy has committed to holding these discussions and producing real and immediate results.

No Sailor, Marine, or Civilian should ever fear for their physical safety or have to fight for basic dignity. It's my expectation that leaders in every Echelon demonstrate the same determination as I have to make sure none of our people have to fight for basic dignity in the course of their daily lives. You have a big role to play in this. You must be courageous and call out these behaviors, respect and protect victims, and set an example of zero tolerance with regard to sexual harassment and assault.

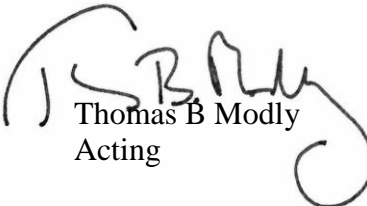
Most importantly, we all must spend time getting to know our shipmates and fellow workers. We must build personal relationships, particularly when we they appear isolated and/or troubled. We must model ourselves after those destroyer captains who risked it all in Operation Pedestal by saddling up next to the sinking SS OHIO and helped her make it to shore safely. You will never ever regret doing this. That shipmate or coworker is precious cargo to someone,

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and when they are victims of sexual harassment or assault, they are often distressed, confused, and ashamed. They do not deserve to feel this way, and they should not feel isolated in dealing with those feelings.

Any instance of harassment or assault on our watch is a tragedy for our entire Navy and Marine Corps family. It will take a lot of work and time to shift the cultural issues that contribute to this. Some of these are societal, but some of them WE own. Nonetheless, I am convinced that the positive elements of our culture are much, much stronger than the negative ones – and they will prevail. So thank you for all you've already done on this issue and for all you do to uphold our sacred honor and time honored oath.

Go Navy, and of course, as always, Beat Army!



Thomas B Modly  
Acting

SECNAV Vectors are released each Friday to the entire DON. Previous Vectors can be viewed <https://navylive.dodlive.mil/2020/01/02/secnav-vectors/>.

- SECNAV VECTOR 1: Priorities and Near-Term Objectives
- SECNAV VECTOR 2: Unified in Grief, Heroism, and Resolve
- SECNAV VECTOR 3: Make Ford Ready
- SECNAV VECTOR 4: December Honors and Remembrance
- SECNAV VECTOR 5: DON Business Operations Plan
- SECNAV VECTOR 6: Path to a 355 Plus Integrated Naval Force
- SECNAV VECTOR 7: Education for Seapower
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