

Naval Submarine Support Facility: Submarine Base New London (B)

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As he slumped into his chair, Captain Rafael “Raf” Cochino unhooked the stiff collar of his *choker whites* (Navy slang for the service dress white uniform made famous by Richard Gere in the movie: *An Officer and a Gentleman*). He’d just finished the change of command ceremony where he had relieved Captain Jack Pine. “Whew. The easy part is over,” he thought. “Now, what’s next?”

The turnover of the Naval Submarine Support Facility (NSSF) had been abbreviated as Jack Pine, his predecessor, needed to get to that five-sided wind tunnel they call the Pentagon to take his job as military assistant to one of those civilian “suits.” The fire hose had been on full force and Raf just needed time to collect his thoughts, assess the situation, and figure out what he could do to lead this organization through the next few years. He wasn’t without his own ideas of how to make the maintenance organization work better. Now, he was going to have his chance in an influential position that afforded him a direct shot at Admiral Alder, who was the commander of Submarine Group TWO (COMSUBGRU TWO).

Raf reflected on the week that went before. The issues seemed so new to him. It was a whole new language, in many respects. Concepts like *workforce* and *workload* took on a whole new meaning when managing civilians came into the equation. It was easy to figure out how to lead a tube full of *nukes* (Navy slang for nuclear trained personnel)—he’d done that his whole life. But what about these folks from Electric Boat (EB) who were assigned to NSSF under the New England Maintenance Manpower Initiative (NEMMI)? What were their particular needs and expectations? Labor unions; contract negotiations; Occupational, Safety, and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations; women laborers? His mind started to reel at the thought of leading this large, complex organization. Profit and loss—that’s a corporate world problem, isn’t it? He was beginning to feel like Gulliver, lost in a foreign land.

There was an upside to all of this though. Assignment to major command was certainly an honor, and an opportunity. The NSSF, in New London, was an exceptional opportunity for a hard charging, proven leader like himself. He was the *King* again. Not just some staff guy or Pentagon action officer. Additionally, a third tour in Groton was just too good a deal for the family. His wife could keep her job, and his daughter could finish up high school with her friends. Heaven knows, they’d had their share of moves and separations in his twenty-one plus years of submarine service. They deserved this time together.

Compared to Jack Pine and his predecessors, Raf was a different sort to get command of the NSSF. Shore maintenance facilities, like the NSSF, had always been the bastion of the officers with former enlisted time, known in the Navy as *mustangs*. Raf was a graduate out of the Academy in Annapolis. A bachelor's degree in physics, master's out of the Naval War College, and command of the USS *Miami* – Raf had worked hard and enjoyed the fast track throughout his career. This was the next big step on his way to flag officer. A standout performance here could make him very competitive.

His thoughts drifted to the *Miami*. Those were great times. Nothing could live up to the pure joy of commanding a submarine. He missed the crew of the *Miami*. They went through a lot together. Nobody knew the newest 688s better than Raf. And, operationally, he'd let the Meritorious Unit Citation and Battle "E" that they earned together serve as testament to the quality of the team with which he had prowled the northern Atlantic. Receipt of the Jack N. Darby award for inspirational leadership and excellence in command were nice, but they were really only icing on the cake. It was the Sailors that Raf would always remember.

Bzzzzt.....the intercom snapped him out of his trance.

"Captain, I've got Commander Tupelo here for the first of your 'howgozit' meetings," Petty Officer Jones reported. "Ah, my repair department guy," Raf thought. "Send him in," he told Jonesy.

"Tup', now that I'm in the saddle, I need another primer on the current status of the NEMMI, EB workforce, and where you think our challenges lie. Before I left the Submarine Development Squadron, I promised I would use my time here to fix some of the issues that Jack wasn't able to get his arms around. By the end of my tour, I'd like to see those piers working smoothly. Basically, it would be nice to have the weapons department and the crane operator's 'union' working for the fleet, instead of the other way around. Been waiting a long time to make some changes and I'm finally in the position to do that. Let's get started." Raf said.

Raf listened intently as Tup' covered the waterfront with him. Civilian EB workers were a challenge with a lot of plusses. Civilians work between EB and NSSF based upon where the available work is. There's usefulness in this in the current economy. The EB workload draws unevenly on skilled labor pools. A couple of Virginia class submarines do not keep workers fully employed at all times.¹ Skills, if not used, lapse or become rusty and therefore quality may suffer. Allowing workforce to flow to where the work is has obvious advantages. There's great training benefit derived by the NEMMI, as well. Civilians can cross train into areas of maintenance that they would not otherwise experience in new construction. Better, smarter ways to get the job done are exchanged. And, they also provide some stability to offset the losses of a rotating military workforce.²

"So, that's some of the good stuff, captain," Tup' said. "But, there's a downside, at times," Tup' continued. "EB civilians are contracted, therefore, you can't call on them to work

24 by 7, like you do the enlisted, unless you pay them overtime or renegotiate the contract. Also, the EB folks don't belong to NSSF directly, so we have to learn new management methods and skills to influence performance. When there's a work-quality issue with an NSSF employee (military or government service (GS)), we can stop work and hold a review board, with little to no loss in production time. Because EB civilians are contracted, it's harder to challenge work quality. It's like a red flag. A union worker will almost always demand that their union representative be present for any review and that can tie up the work production schedule.⁴

Tup' went on. "The Sailors are keenly aware of the pay differential between themselves and their civilian counterparts, who's performing precisely the same job. Contracted workforce are job specific hires. Welders weld, electricians do electrical work, and plumbers plumb. If you want to get stuff lugged down to the piers, you need to find a *stuff lugger*. That equates to a young Sailor, by definition. And, when the whistle blows, the civilians hit the bricks. This has impacted our retention in the past and shows up time and again as a dissatisfier in surveys we conduct."

"Got it, Tup'. How's things with the triple-S-U?" (Submarine Squadron Support Unit (SSSU))

"Better," Tup' said. "We get first right of refusal now on all work that goes to the SSSU. If our workload/workforce permits, we accept the job. Otherwise, we recommend that SSSU assign the work to another maintenance organization in the region."⁵

"Sounds good," Raf said. "So, Tup', what should I be losing sleep over?"

Tup' sat up on the edge of his chair. "We do have a problem with the dry dock (ARDM) leaving this year.⁶ Unless we get the Navy to keep the ARDM in Groton, we'll need to find alternatives. Without alternatives, we've got real schedule problems."

"Any chance we can slow the ARDM issue down a bit?" Raf asked.

"Perhaps, Cap'n," Tup' said. "But, manning for the ARDM *Oakridge* has already been terminated. The Sailors I have on board right now will be sufficient to man the dock until the last SSN undocks this summer. After that, I'll have just enough bodies to take her into inactivation with final crew release at the end of September 2001. Don't know what the COMSUBLANT and CINCLANTFLT plan is, but the cost of using EB's graving docks, and the need for docking space, create a tension that exceeds the area's capacity on a couple of occasions in the future. These are things that should be taken into account as they implement their ARDM plan. If we can't delay *Oakridge*, perhaps we can find a dock that is underutilized that we could bring up here. *Resolute* is in overhaul down in Norfolk, captain. Maybe we can make a grab for her?"

"Well thanks for that bit of sunshine, Tup'. I'll put that on my 'easy to do' list." Raf grimaced. "What are the issues with the ebb and flow that I need to know?"

“The ARDM issue sure does exacerbate the ebb and flow problem of the workload, captain. Right now, we only have three subs in port, with zero in upkeep. Good news for now, with the low sub repair tempo - a lot of buildings are getting painted. But, looking down range on the schedule, there are times where we anticipate eight to ten subs in upkeep. So, the ebb and flow is primarily a manpower employment efficiency issue for NSSF. We need sufficient workers to handle the load when we are at peak periods of upkeep, but we need to keep people gainfully employed when there’s only one sub to work on. With a pure Sailor workforce, I can shift to facility maintenance, authorized liberal leave, sign people up for schools, etcetera. However, with the shift towards EB workers, the need for efficient management of personnel is more critical and complex. We have some leeway in the numbers of people that can be sent back up the street, but that is somewhat dependent upon EB’s ability to find other employment for those workers. The other approach is to spread out the workforce – like we just recently did with the establishment of a second work shift. Now, rather than paying overtime to work a critical job into the evening, we use a dedicated shift of Sailors and EB workers that work from 1530 until about 2300.”

“How’s that working?” Raf asked.

“It seems to be working out okay. Don’t have a lot of data points – still too soon to tell, really. It does require us to be particularly careful which jobs we schedule for the second shift – not a good idea to be breaking into seawater systems or doing major hot work late at night when there is only a skeleton duty section on board to respond to casualties.”

Bzzzzzzzzzzt.....

“COMSUBGRU TWOs office is on the line, captain,” Jonesy announced. “Once you pick up, they’ll put Admiral Alder on the line. Probably just a congratulations call or something, eh sir?”

Raf picked up the phone and waited for the admiral to pick up the phone.

“Raf,” the admiral barked. “I’ve just returned from the November predecisional briefing of the northeast maintenance vision for the submarine force. I’ve got a copy of the briefing and I’m sending some slides over to you for review and comment. I need to hear your thoughts on the plan, in particular where NSSF is concerned. Let’s see, it’s Thursday now...how about you get on my calendar for Monday?”

“Aye aye, Sir” Raf snapped back.

“Good,” the admiral responded. “NSSF has gotten another great captain to lead it. Jack did a great job. Things are changing in the Navy and in the northeast region. Regionalization brings a whole new corporate view to the way we do business. We’re all going to get some resistance from well meaning folks who just can’t, or won’t, see the way ahead. It’s going to demand a lot of the leadership to learn better ways to do business. We’re looking forward to nothing but the best things from you, Raf. Congratulations again.”

As Raf reviewed the predisciplinary briefing (Appendix A), he couldn't help noticing that on 30 March, Admiral Alder had hosted a Northeast Regional Maintenance Executive Working Group at Naval Reactors. In the meeting, it was decided that the three primary providers in the northeast would remain separate activities, with each retaining their core missions. For NSSF, that was intermediate-level (or "I"-Level) work. EB would continue to focus on new construction, and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNS) would conduct overhauls.⁷

In addition, NSSF would be used as a neutral site for PNS and EB to develop efficiencies and share critical trade skill manpower. The CINCLANTFLT vision calls for a corporate effort, vice trying to consolidate maintenance organizations as directed in the other Atlantic/Pacific regions.⁸ This, it postulated, would keep maintenance affordable, level the imbalances in the *workforce to workload* equation, optimize Sailor manning and training concerns, and achieve economies of scale by optimizing the use of public and private drydocking resources in the region.⁹ In a nutshell, they would form a partnering venture that would share civilian and military regional resources to capitalize on the best industry business practices.¹⁰

The NEMMI data seemed about right. By FY-03, if everything followed the plan, NSSF would have 270 contractor civilians to replace the 431 surface-designated enlisted billets.¹¹

Raf pondered the organizational wiring diagram for the Proposed Regional Support Group (RSG) for Groton to see where he and NSSF would fit into the picture. In it, he noticed, the officer in charge of the new Nuclear Regional Maintenance Department (NRMD) Military Detachment would report to him. This was good news. It gave him some control over a new manpower base to get the delicate work of reactor maintenance completed. "What's this?" Raf was astonished.

There, on the PowerPoint slide, Raf learned that, organizationally, NSSF would now fall under another, new organization, called the Regional Support Group (RSG), that would be commanded by an O-6 submariner. The CO of the RSG would, in turn, report to COMSUGRU TWO (Admiral Alder), who would be the Regional Maintenance Center commander. As NSSF's ISIC (immediate superior in the chain of command), the RSG commanding officer would broker the maintenance of New London homeported submarines between SSSU, NSSF, and the floating drydocks. It was a new echelon between him and Admiral Alder, and he would be told what his workload would be, instead of managing it himself.¹²

Then it dawned on him.

He'd always looked forward to major command. He was ready to make the big decisions, to really have an impact on the way business got done in the submarine force. But now, with the RSG, he had been pushed into the middle of an organization. No real voice at the table. "Just carry out the plan of the day," Raf muttered under his breath. "Instead of being a commanding officer, I feel more like a department head again." What would his

contribution be for the next several years? A “care taker” commanding officer? What kind of leadership role was he going to play? A rebel ISTJ nuke without a cause, he reflected.

“What a great first day in command,” he thought. Raf picked up his pencil and began to organize his thoughts to address the admiral’s questions.

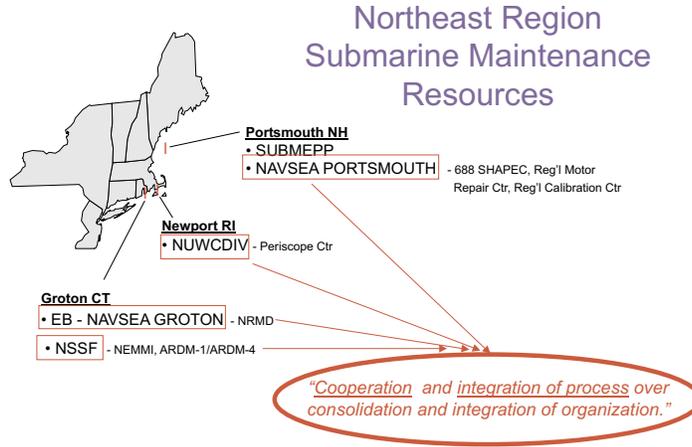
Notes

1. CO, NSSF, Interview by author (telephone), Newport, RI, 17 October 2000. [www.spear.navy.mil/RegionalMaintenance/RMIB_2000_11/ReadAhead/7 NE_11-14-00 RMIB Brief.ppt](http://www.spear.navy.mil/RegionalMaintenance/RMIB_2000_11/ReadAhead/7%20NE_11-14-00%20RMIB%20Brief.ppt), [accessed: 14 January 2001], 2.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. CINCLANTFLT, “Northeast Maintenance Vision (Submarines),” available at: <http://>
8. Ibid., 3.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 4.
11. Ibid., 9.
12. Ibid., 11.



APPENDIX A

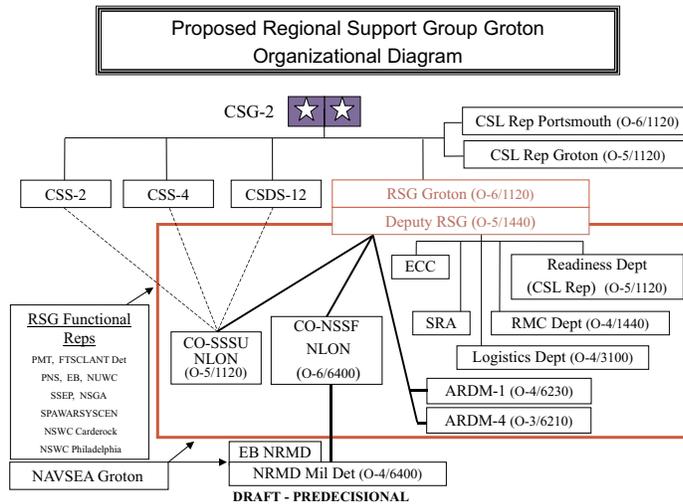
Figure 1



DRAFT - PREDECISIONAL

Source: CINCLANTFLT, "Northeast Maintenance Vision (Submarines)," available at: <http://www.spear.navy.mil/RegionalMaintenance/RMIB_2000_11/ReadAhead/7_NE_11-14-00_RMIB_Brief.ppt>, [accessed: 14 January 2001], p. 2.

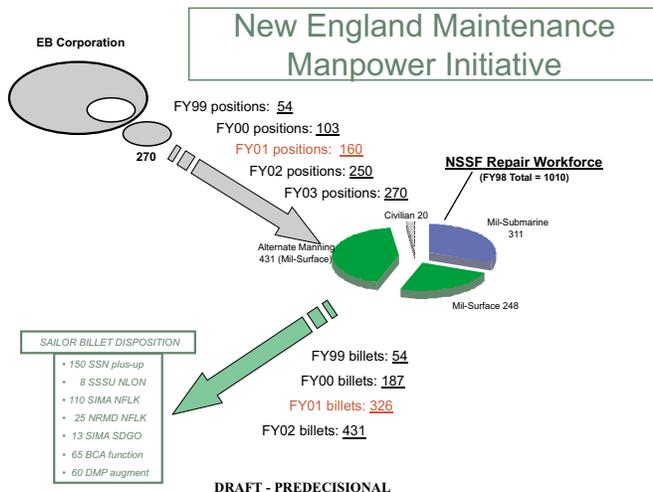
Figure 2



Source: CINCLANTFLT, "Northeast Maintenance Vision (Submarines)," available at: <http://www.spear.navy.mil/RegionalMaintenance/RMIB_2000_11/ReadAhead/7_NE_11-14-00_RMIB_Brief.ppt>, [accessed: 14 January 2001], p. 11.

APPENDIX A (CONT.)

Figure 3



Source: CINCLANTFLT, "Northeast Maintenance Vision (Submarines)," available at: <http://www.spear.navy.mil/RegionalMaintenance/RMIB_2000_11/ReadAhead/7_NE_11-14-00_RMIB_Brief.ppt>, [accessed: 14 January 2001], p. 9.