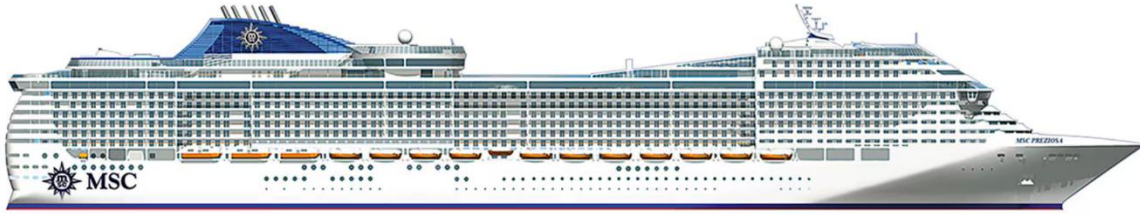


POSSIBLE WAR SHIP



Pictured here, there is no doubt that this is a cruise ship. Things perceived from a submerged submarine are vastly different. This short one-page story documents my only error made in all the Sonar watches I stood while riding the boats. I knew at the time that there was a possibility of a “wrong call” but armed with the information I had available I made the call I did. Only to be corrected about 20 minutes later by the Officer-of-the-Deck (OOD). To which I responded, as described here.

We were at the tail end of one of our missions in the Mediterranean, and we were proceeding towards Naples such that we could celebrate a holiday weekend ashore, in a great Liberty Port. As we were about to make one of our final island avoidance maneuvers we made our way to Periscope depth to copy the broadcast. Only to find out that our mission had been extended to examine what appeared to be some adversarial wargames. No holiday for us.

We changed course and started to make our way to the area where we believed such an activity would take place. As we got closer to that area we slowed and from the appropriate depth started to make careful sonar sweep-arounds. I was on the passive search stack, the guy I had just relieved had moved over to the active stack (but it was in passive mode of operation), and he was keeping track of the three possible war-ships that had been picked up so far, all of them moving slowly down our starboard side.

Me being on the passive stack, I was searching the area we were headed towards, and at one point I thought I had a new contact, so I was concentrating on the area just about 20 degrees off our port bow. It didn't take me long to realize that this new contact was going to be difficult, as by the sound of things he was headed towards us. But since the range was going to close quickly, the two of us headed towards each other I assigned the very faint indication a Sierra number. The next contact number was going to be 184.

A short time later, the OOD gave us the orders to make a careful sweep-around and advise, as we were going to proceed to periscope depth. We did so, both the control room fire-control tracking party and us in Sonar were in complete agreement with the possible warships we were tracking and had assigned them Master numbers. And the time came for me to make a decision on the new Sierra #, I had gained.

“Conn, Sonar, A new contact Sierra 184 now bears 340 relative and is approaching; I have to add that this contact is a possible war-ship by screw/blade sounds only. Although he is the closest and most likely on closing course.”

“Sonar-Conn Aye, make a complete sweep around, as we are coming to periscope depth on a turn to port.”

“Conn, Sonar Aye” I said, and I started to sweep the area coming out of the baffles on the port side to 90 degrees relative back and forth quickly, ensuring that the only sounds I had were of contacts already reported – and that there was nothing new. This was tricky because going up and turning at the same time opened up a lot of things acoustically.

“Sonar-Conn, passing 100 feet, are we clear?”

“Conn-Sonar Yes, no new contacts to report, Sierra 184 is still possibly our closest contact now bearing 020 relative, but with a low SPL level, I have to retain a classification of a possible war-ship.”

SEVERAL MINUTES LATER

“Sonar-Conn, we are at periscope depth and your possible war-ship Sierra 184 is a cruise ship with a significant wake.”

“Conn-Sonar, AYE. can we take a shot at her and screw up their holiday as well?”

My fellow watch stander, sitting at the active stack to the right of me joined in:

“Conn-Sonar, I am on Sierra 184 and can establish a lock for fire control.”

“Sonar-Conn, yes retain the lock on Sierra 184, she is between us and the other Master numbers now well astern. We are going to turn behind Sierra 184 when she passes amidship and head back to the others. - - - - Making them the targets will give Sierra 184 passengers more to talk about, should it come to that”.

We both replied “Conn-Sonar, Aye”. While smiling at each other – we had our holiday high point.