

[Login](#). Not a member? [Join now](#)

[Home](#)
[Benefits](#)
[News](#)
[Entertainment](#)
[Shop](#)
[Finance](#)
[Careers](#)
[Education](#)
[Join the Military](#)
[Community](#)

**Military.com**  
MILITARY HEADLINES

## The Naval Institute: *Proceedings*

### Put a Swat Team on Every Ship

Related Links

***Proceedings*, December 2002**  
**Lieutenant Colonel Paul Mullin, U.S. Army,**  
**and Lieutenant Jon Bartee, U.S. Navy**

[Proceedings Article Index](#)

[This month's Proceedings](#)

[Visit the Naval Institute](#)

[Upcoming Naval Institute Seminars](#)

[Equipment Guides: Weapons](#)

*In the war on terror, the force protection and maritime interdiction missions are becoming more important—and more dangerous. Every ship needs a well-armed tactical team trained to successfully and safely handle these missions.*

Imagine a scenario in which intelligence sources have uncovered a plot to use a merchant ship packed with explosives to destroy the Panama Canal. Although the source is deemed credible, the ship's name, description, flag, and port of origin are unknown. The worldwide economic impact makes closing the canal impossible. When confronted with the threat's magnitude, the Panamanian government officially requests U.S. assistance. More than 12,000 ships transit the canal in a year, on average more than 35 a day.<sup>1</sup> There simply are not enough naval special warfare assets available to board that number of ships. Fortunately, there is a tool available to narrow the search: in our scenario, Navy surface combatants have augmented both force protection and maritime interdiction capabilities. Each ship has a shipboard integrated tactical team (SITT) that protects the ship against a variety of threats while in port, but also is trained to conduct maritime interdiction and to extract itself if a low-threat boarding turns ugly. Second and Third Fleets immediately dispatch ships to the canal zone.

 [Printer-Friendly Format](#)

#### What Is a SIT Team?

Although warships maintain visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) teams for maritime interdiction, and a ship self-defense force (SSDF), today's Navy is ill prepared to respond to a threat such as our Panama scenario. The current method of training and equipping these individual teams is redundant and does not meet the challenges of force protection and sea-lane control. The Navy



U.S. NAVY (SHANE MCCOY)

needs a special detail of well-trained and equipped sailors that can safely handle the squad-level tactical missions required of our warships nearly every day, as well as meet expanding future requirements. These missions encompass VBSS, SSDF, pier and harbor defense, and landing force duties when required. The shipboard integrated tactical team concept provides a road map for how both present and future needs can be met with increased capability and flexibility at a minimum cost in time and resources.

The idea centers on integrating the VBSS and SSDF mission into a single team under the control of the commanding officer. Beyond a simple watchbill merger, however, the SITT concept requires a shift in the enlisted rates we select for team members and the level to which we train and equip these sailors. We must not modify the criteria for which ships we board, but change the sailors' capabilities to better match the threat. We do not propose creating a miniature SEAL team on board ship, capable of covert offensive operations, but we must train sailors adequately for the challenging defensive requirements of both VBSS and in-port defense.

Partial cross membership in VBSS and SSDF teams makes training repetitious. Each team must teach the same skills separately, never moving beyond basic techniques to bring the minority up to speed. Further, these teams traditionally have relied heavily on the "weapons department rates" for members, which becomes critical at sea when these same rates are watchstanders in other essential warfighting stations. At the same time, these rates lack expertise with other aspects of ship operation.

There are two solutions to this predicament. First, form a single integrated tactical team that performs both ship defense and maritime interdiction. Second, form the team from a broad range of rates, all well trained and motivated to win.

### SITT Missions

The scarcity of replenishment ships and the common use of warship visits as a method of diplomatic engagement mean that moderate- or high-risk port calls are necessary. Current plans propose the use of "supplementary forces," such as naval special warfare assets (SEALs), explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) personnel, or fleet antiterrorism support team (FAST) Marines to enhance security in these ports.<sup>2</sup> Only a small number of these forces are available, and the global war on terrorism already has placed disproportionate demands on them. Logistics and diplomatic clearances further restrict employment of such forces. In addition, providing ship defense detracts from their ability to maintain their unique warfighting skills.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the offensive nature of their training may make them less effective at defending a naval vessel in a foreign port. Conversely, nobody knows a ship as well as her sailors. [The attack on the USS Cole](#) (DDG-67) shows that port assessments can be mistaken, and supplementary forces may not even be deployed until it is too late.

The fact that these elite units are being contemplated sheds light on the increased threat. Dependence on any force beyond the warship's lifelines, however, significantly reduces the key advantages of naval forces: mobility, flexibility, and self-reliance. Defending ships is not the job of Marines or SEALs—it is the job of the surface warriors who sail in them. The SITT concept provides these warriors with the tools they need.

A force protection team also gives enhanced maritime interdiction capabilities to every warship. This is fortunate because maritime interdiction is not a transient phenomenon. Sanctions against Iraq may not last forever, but the requirement for interdiction in new conflicts will arise, often in deep water with no anchorages for diverted ships. No one foresaw that VBSS would be required in military operations involving a landlocked nation, yet a massive effort is under way to capture al Qaeda and Taliban leadership attempting to escape by sea. In addition, the counterdrug mission will receive new life as the close connection between narcotics smuggling and terrorism becomes evident.<sup>4</sup> Terrorists have demonstrated understanding of merchant ships as a vector for supplies and infiltration, or even profit.<sup>5</sup> Al Qaeda training manuals are full of advice on cover stories and deception, yet advocate violence to avoid capture.<sup>6</sup> It is only a matter of time before an initially compliant merchant ship's crew is discovered to be more dangerous than they appear.

### Training Advantages

Under the SITT concept, basic skills are taught to one team once, leaving time available to introduce and reinforce more advanced skills. VBSS teams regularly attend courses that teach advanced room clearing, weapon retention, and emergency egress rappelling, but these perishable skills soon are lost under the current structure because ships lack the training tools and organization to retain them.

Varied-rate membership ensures that other missions can be accomplished concurrently with VBSS, and allows the boarding party to meet the requirements of a prize crew for long-duration, deep-water boardings. For defense in port, a wide cross-section of rates allows familiarity with a range of spaces and evolutions and deepens team knowledge about specific security weaknesses. The qualification of SITT members in security-related evolutions will improve flexibility in duty section watchbills as well.

The intangible advantages would be equally important. The SITT concept reinforces the warrior culture within the surface Navy. Sailors will see a positive, aggressive effort to better protect their lives, their home at sea, and the capability to carry out their mission. Membership will become a source of pride, as well as an excellent performance evaluation item. Exposure to a variety of rates, equipment, spaces, and evolutions will assist in the pursuit of warfare qualifications. The flexing of critical decision-making skills and improved physical conditioning will enhance performance in areas unrelated to SITT missions. Successful team members will be a valuable commodity, either in their next afloat tour or in a civilian law enforcement career.

The SITT should be composed of 36 volunteers from any rate, with significant representation from each department. The department head responsible for force protection is suited to lead the SITT. Membership requirements should match those for VBSS team members. A three-team structure will reduce fatigue during heavy boarding operations and allow the same teams to remain intact for three-section duty rotation in foreign ports.

In addition to their role as tactical team members, each sailor should be assigned

to a SITT cadre that would conduct training and maintain equipment. Topics such as defensive firing in confined spaces, rules of engagement, and force-on-force training would be conducted by the tactical cadre. The weapons cadre would handle weapons qualification and maintenance. The physical training cadre would conduct unit exercise and train the team in self-defense, handcuff and search procedures, and weapon retention. The climbing cadre would maintain VBSS climbing equipment and conduct training on cargo container searches. It also would organize water survival training and liaison with the air department for helicopter rescue training. The operations cadre would schedule training and organize schools and guest instructors. Tactical training needs to go beyond traditional scenarios of containing a threat and calling for help, as a threat may have to be immediately neutralized before he can damage the ship. Basic explosives recognition should be provided by EOD personnel. Water survival and rescue need to be thoroughly covered, areas ignored in VBSS training. Free expertise should be leveraged wherever possible.

Training should be conducted twice a week for two to three hours to build and maintain an advanced skill level. For comparison, this is approximately the amount of time spent in training by police departments with a part-time SWAT team made up of officers with regular patrol schedules. This is also the amount of time dedicated to VBSS team training on board at least one permanently forward-deployed ship, the USS Gary (FFG-51), without including the redundant time spent training SSDF teams.

### Equipping the SITT

Equipping a SITT would be relatively inexpensive. Most equipment already is on board as part of the normal loadout. The balance can be purchased out of operational accounts or with the assistance of force protection oriented funds such as the Combating Terrorism Readiness Initiative Fund (CbTRIF). The CbTRIF is a joint-services fund designed to provide financial support for emergent or high-priority force protection equipment or construction. It specifically authorizes expenditures for changes in threat level or doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Ships that have made recent VBSS-intensive deployments will have less expense. Some may need only to increase the quantity of a few items to the full 36.

Concealable body armor always is more comfortable and cool than SWAT-style tactical armor, is available in all levels of protection, and will allow standard flotation devices to be worn over it. Flotation foam can be added for little additional cost. Many manufacturers make a tactical raid-style carrier for overt use with their concealable armor, including pouches for radios and ammunition magazines. This allows the flexibility to post armed and armored watches in dress uniforms for dignitary visits or in politically sensitive ports, as well as providing the load-bearing and deterrent advantage of the tactical carrier when a strong presence is required. Unobtrusive body armor also would be available for distinguished visitors or the commanding officer if required.



The Tactical teams should be equipped with the M-4 carbine (top), which is 6 pounds lighter and 17 inches shorter than the M-14 rifle, originally issued in 1957. The Navy is the only service still carrying the M-14, which also uses 7.62-mm ammunition unsuited for use in close quarters and inside a ship.

A serious look must be taken at a new threat-driven requirement for small arms. The [M-14 rifle](#) no longer is suited to the type of varied threats posed to a ship. Despite its accuracy, the slow rate of fire and heavy recoil make it better suited to shooting the enemy out of a tall ship's rigging than volume defensive fire against a fast, maneuvering powerboat close aboard. Its size and weight, coupled with the danger of ricochet, make it unsuitable inside the skin of a ship and therefore useless for both internal defense and VBSS. Shotguns are of limited use in a close-quarters environment where friendly and hostile are intertwined, and completely ineffective beyond 25 to 50 yards. Royal Navy boarding teams use assault rifles, resulting in immediate compliance from merchant sailors, an effect used by many police SWAT teams to minimize resistance. Navy armories carry nothing comparable for VBSS.

When asked to recommend a rifle that would be useable for both close-quarters and medium-distance shooting, members of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps special operations and infantry communities unanimously responded in favor of the new M-4 carbine. A variant of the [M-16A2 rifle](#), the M-4 has more than 80% parts commonality with the standard rifle issued by the other services, as well as by many Navy shore stations. In contrast, the Navy is the only remaining large-scale user of the M-14, and major repairs can be accomplished only by mailing the weapon back to Crane, Indiana. The M-4 fires an [5.56-mm round](#) that has significantly less probability of ricochet and overpenetration, meaning less danger

to unintended targets.<sup>8</sup> Lighter ammunition also means that one-third more can be carried for roughly the same weight and space. The M-4 not only is accurate at more than 300 yards, but it also is used routinely by both military and police SWAT units for close-quarters operations. Some of the M-14s in each ship's armory need to be replaced with at least 12 M-4 carbines.

The M-79 40-mm grenade launcher also is a capable weapon, but it is vastly underutilized. Most vessels carry only expensive high-explosive grenades, and annual training allowances for an entire ship do not meet the minimum number of rounds required to qualify a single sailor on the weapon. More varieties of ammunition need to be explored.

An increase in the allowance of [M-9 9-mm pistols](#) to 40 would allow the simultaneous deployment of all three teams if necessary. Ammunition allowances should be made to qualify both the SITT membership and the ship's other armed watchstanders.

### The Alternative

On 12 October 2000, a massive explosion blew a hole in the side of the [Cole](#), killing 17 sailors and injuring 39. On 18 November 2001, the diverted merchant Samra sank in the Northern Arabian Gulf. Two members of a VBSS team lost their lives, presumably trapped in the sinking ship. If we are to avoid losing people while carrying out missions, the Navy must think and act out of the box.

A captured al Qaeda training manual written in 2000 states, "We don't have to attack a tiger if we can attack a lamb."<sup>9</sup> The SITT concept provides the framework for the Navy to be a tiger when it comes to both maritime interdiction and ship defense. The 2002 Defense Authorization Act recognized the danger inherent to our sailors by adding VBSS to the list of Hazardous Duty Incentive Pay missions. We need to train and equip our sailors to meet that danger fully prepared.

1. El Canal de Panama, Virtual Newsroom section of the [Panama Canal Authority \(ACP\) Website](#), 13 April 2002. [[Back to article](#)]

2. Mobile security forces (MSF) made up of SEALs and explosive ordnance disposal sailors are being formed to protect the civilian-crewed ships of the Combat Logistics Force. Although this may be necessary in their case, such an approach is a dangerous mistake for the combatant navy. [[Back to article](#)]

3. Interview with Gordon Schacher, Institute for Joint Warfare Analysis, U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, 24 January 2002. [[Back to article](#)]

4. Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 116-27. Smuggling netted the Taliban more than \$3 billion annually, their single largest source of revenue. Although Afghanistan has no ports, this traffic moved through Karachi, Pakistan, with a smaller amount moving through Iranian ports. [[Back to article](#)]

5. The U.S. Coast Guard has requested assistance with port security and inspection of merchant vessels. The Israeli capture of a seaborne arms shipment has had reverberating consequences. Ominously, the United Kingdom's recent search of a vessel suspected of carrying "terrorist materials" leads one to think of our own domestic security. [[Back to article](#)]

6. "The Al-Qaeda Manual," recovered by Manchester, England, metropolitan police during the investigation of the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center Towers. Partial manual is available [online](#), 14 April 2002. [[Back to article](#)]

7. CJCSI 5261.01A, Combating Terrorism Readiness Initiative Fund (1 August 1998). [[Back to article](#)]

8. "A Portion of the FBI Study: Evaluation of the 5.56-mm/.223-caliber Round for Close Quarter Battle (CQB) SWAT Matter—Executive Summary," from <http://blackwaterlodge.com/btw/articles/fbistudy.html>, 13 April 2002. A 1994 study by the FBI's Firearms Training Unit determined that the 5.56-mm showed less penetration through all types of barriers, except protective body armor, than 9-mm ammunition fired from a submachine gun. As such it concluded that it might be a better choice of caliber for law enforcement because of the reduced risk of overpenetration hitting a bystander. [[Back to article](#)]

9. Commander, Naval Surface Force, Atlantic Fleet, "Special Assessment: Terrorism Tactics and Procedures," R151845Z FEB 02, readdressed from Commander-in-Chief U.S. Naval Forces Europe, P111112Z FEB 02. [[Back to article](#)]

### The Author:

Commander Kibble is a deputy headteacher at Huntington School in York who has

written extensively in books and journals on theological, political, educational, and management issues. A former commanding officer of HMS Ceres, he has written on both sides of the Atlantic on defense issues, particularly on the Islamic background to problems in the Middle East and on the ethics of nuclear deterrence.

© 2002 U.S. Naval Institute. All rights reserved.

---

**Military.com Network:** [Defense Tech](#) [DoD Buzz](#) [SpouseBuzz](#)

**Services:** [Army](#) [Marine Corps](#) [Navy](#) [Air Force](#) [Coast Guard](#) [National Guard](#)

**About Military.com:** [About Us & Press Room](#) [Advertise With Us](#) [RSS](#) [Help](#) [User Agreement](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Mobile](#) [Site Map](#)

[AdChoices](#) | [Like us on](#) , [follow us on](#) and [join us on Google+](#)

© 2016 Military Advantage

A Monster Company.