

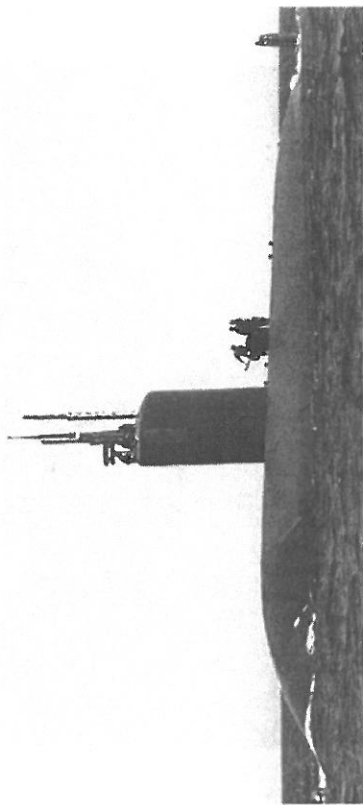


FIGURE 2.1. The fast-attack nuclear submarine USS *Greeneville*. Note the reinforced sail (forward) and rudder (aft) designed to break through ice.⁵

the visitors' presence, although perhaps a passive deterrent," influenced the watch team's performance. Yet, the passengers "were not the only reason" for this accident. "There was *something else* going on," the admiral observed. "And I'm still not sure in my own mind what that something else was."⁶

Greeneville's crew was well rested, expertly trained, and widely regarded as one of "the best on the waterfront."⁷ The submarine was a marvel of modern technology. And Captain Waddle was charismatic, confident, and popular with his crew – a highly decorated officer with a distinguished record of achievement, an excellent reputation, and a 'go-Navy' attitude. They were exactly the right crew in the right submarine to take distinguished visitors on a public affairs outing and put on a good show. Or were they?

About a month before the collision, the *Ehime Maru* departed Japan and the Uwajima Fisheries School, steering for Hawaii where the weather was warm, fish were plentiful, and waters thought to be safe. A floating classroom, the ship trained high school students in engineering, preparing them for the professional fishing trade. On the day of the accident, the *Ehime Maru*, a gleaming white vessel, exited

USS *Greeneville* – The Downside of Charismatic Leadership

Commanding Officers have a lot of presence onboard submarines ... and for the most part, their judgments are unquestioned. Their decisions are unquestioned. They are the authority at sea. If the CO says it is safe, who is going to question that it is not safe?

Lieutenant Junior Grade Michael John Coen,
Officer of the Deck during USS *Greeneville's*
collision with *Ehime Maru*⁸

On February 9, 2001, the USS *Greeneville*, an American fast-attack nuclear submarine, collided with a Japanese fishing trawler, the *Ehime Maru*, during a routine training mission off the Hawaiian Islands. The accident occurred when the submarine, embarked for a community relations day, ascended like a rocket during an emergency surfacing demonstration for sixteen civilian dignitaries and a visiting admiral. The *Greeneville's* powerful steel rudder, designed to surface through thick ice, destroyed the fishing boat, sinking it in less than ten minutes and killing nine crewmembers (see Figure 2.1).²

Two extensive federal investigations, one by the National Transportation Safety Board and the other by a U.S. Navy *Court of Inquiry*, concluded that "the responsibility for collision avoidance rests solely on the submerged submarine."³ Moreover, the Navy blamed the *Greeneville* captain, Commander Scott D. Waddle, for "the failure of the ship's watch team to work together" to avoid the collision.⁴ Immediately following the accident, the embarked admiral began a preliminary investigation, later reporting: "There's no question that

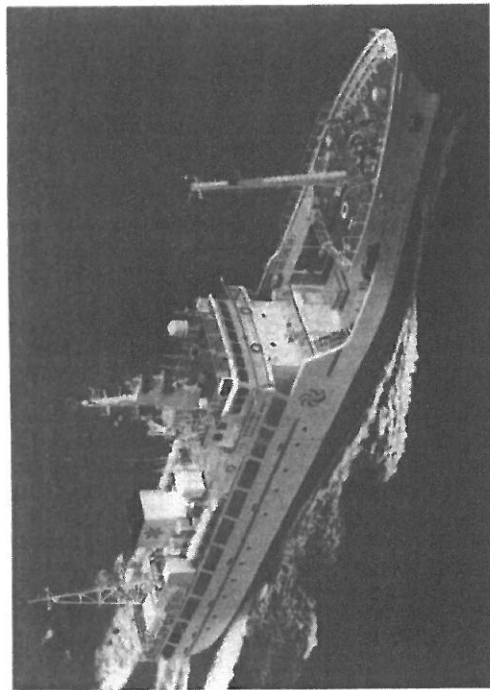


FIGURE 2.2. The Japanese fishing vessel *Ehime Maru*.⁸

Honolulu Harbor at noon en route to fishing grounds about 300 nautical miles south of Oahu for the day's lessons (see Figure 2.2). Once outside the harbor, the captain, a forty-year maritime veteran, increased the trawler's speed to eleven knots and engaged the ship's autopilot, steady on course 166 degrees. The autopilot maintained this exact configuration until the *Greeneville* collision twenty-eight minutes later (see Figure 2.3).

That same morning, the *Greeneville* departed Pearl Harbor on schedule at 8 A.M. to conduct their public relations cruise, transiting out of the harbor on the water's surface so guests could visit the bridge and observe the captain and his team in operation. Lieutenant Keith A. Sloan, the navigator, noted there was "a high choppy sea state" and a "hazy, off-white sky," which was "probably the worst I've seen" for identifying vessels through the periscope. "You could actually see a long, long distance, but not see *clearly* very far at all."⁹ Sloan recalled viewing two trawlers through the periscope about equal distance away. "One was dark-hulled, the other white." As the ships came closer, he noted no problem acquiring the "dark-hulled vessel during periscope

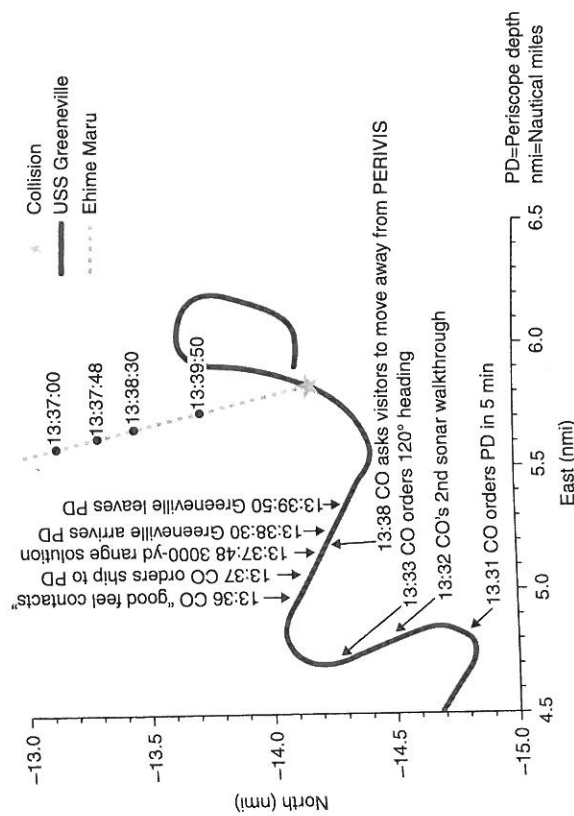


FIGURE 2.3. USS *Greeneville* and *Ehime Maru* collision track. Plot shows the actions of the Commanding Officer (CO) Captain Waddle and the track of the USS *Greeneville* and *Ehime Maru* prior to their collision on February 9, 2001.¹⁰

sweeps, but concerted effort was required to relocate the white-hulled vessel." Yet, none of this information was passed on to the captain or other watchstanders.¹¹

As the submarine left Pearl Harbor, a new young officer, Lieutenant Junior Grade Michael J. Coen, was busy below decks readying the submarine to dive. With a reputation for being "methodical to a fault,"¹² Coen was one of the last to finalize preparations to dive, a delay that "did not go unnoticed" by senior officers. "I got some very high tension from the captain" about that delay, Coen recalled.¹³ Once outside the harbor, the *Greeneville* submerged and events proceeded as planned. Guests toured the submarine, driving the ship in the control room and listening to water noises and whale recordings in the sonar room. But around 11 A.M., things began to go awry.

finally commenced the first event. Called 'angles and dangles,' this maneuver demonstrated the submarine's ability to rapidly change depth and speed like an airplane evading threats. As OOD, Coen was in charge of executing the maneuvers. Yet, Captain Waddle stood immediately behind him "driving the whole evolution" while describing events for the civilian guests crowded around him. Coen became just "a mouthpiece,"¹⁹ parroting the captain's commands to other watchstanders.²⁰ Lieutenant Sloan recalled he had been in a similar situation before. He said Captain Waddle "wants it done quickly. He wants it done his way. I didn't like it and I'm sure that Coen didn't like it either."²¹ Would Coen resist the captain's pressure? Sloan was unsure: "I have seen" Coen "stand up" to other senior officers before. "I would assume" that "would translate over to the captain as well. Maybe, maybe not."²²

The next event was a high-speed turn demonstration displaying the submarine's maneuverability evading torpedoes in a tactical setting. "As it had been during angles, the attention of the" captain and OOD "was focused exclusively on ship control," so much that when Coen attempted to leave the immediate area – as he should to keep abreast of the sonar picture and obstacles in the area – Captain Waddle "stopped him," "placing a hand on his shoulder accompanied by words about how his attention needed to be on ship control."²³ Meanwhile, Captain Waddle continued to narrate the evolution, proudly boasting he "would challenge any other boat to perform these maneuvers so well."²⁴ The visitors agreed: "It was a very professional job," the admiral recalled.²⁵

Yet high-speed turns disturb the water, creating what sonar operators describe as "spaghetti noodles moving all over" their viewing screens.²⁶ As a result, contact with the *Ehime Maru* was lost for two minutes at 1:33 p.m. To update the data, Seacrest needed the submarine steady on course, speed, and depth for *at least two*, three- to five-minute legs in order to triangulate the boat's position, developing an accurate picture of obstacles in the area.²⁷ Yet for a series of reasons,

this steady state was not forthcoming, unbeknownst to the team, the *Ehime Maru* – still steady on course 166 at eleven knots – had now closed to within 6,000 yards.

The final, fateful series of events began with an ascent to periscope depth, a visual search for surface obstacles, a quick evasive dive, and the emergency surfacing maneuver. To accomplish this safely, the *Greeneville* still needed to reacquire reliable sonar data and update their picture of surface obstacles in the area. However, rather than provide the crew the time they needed, Captain Waddle surprised his team with another unusual action. He ordered Lieutenant Junior Grade Coen to "get to periscope depth in five minutes," an impossible order to accomplish legally and safely.²⁸

Although other officers heard the captain's order and later testified that they thought it to be overly aggressive, they nonetheless did and said nothing to intervene. Coen recalled, "I believed it was rapid and rushed" to execute the captain's order. "And I was tense and excited and basically to be challenged like this" with everyone "watching me," but "I believed it was achievable." Relying on the experience of his captain, he stated, "At no time did I feel that it could not be done or that if we did it, it would be unsafe."²⁹

Ten minutes before collision, Petty Officer Seacrest reacquired contact with the boats in their area. Mistakenly satisfied that he had an accurate picture on the two previously held vessels, Seacrest began to concentrate on identifying the new contact. It was highly unusual, if not dangerously unsafe, for a submarine to ascend to periscope depth without a clear picture of surface obstacles. This risk concerned and distracted Seacrest from recognizing the *Ehime Maru*'s position now just 2,510 yards away and still closing. Yet, rushed by the captain, crowded by observers, and distracted by his new contact, Seacrest failed to notice. The team proceeded to periscope depth – the charismatic captain eager to demonstrate his submarine's power and crew's tactical skills, and the fledgling OOD too new to know better.

As the *Greeneville* periscope broke the surface, Coen completed three quick visual sweeps as waves slapped against the viewer. Just as he reported "no close contacts," Captain Waddle took the periscope, raised the ship a few feet to clear the waves, and began conducting his own scan of the hazy horizon, looking for surface obstacles. Intending to take the crew by surprise, the captain abruptly ordered 'emergency deep' after just sixty-six seconds at periscope depth, a third unconventional maneuver, and the crew responded, quickly diving the submarine.

At 1:40 P.M. – five minutes before impact – Petty Officer Seacrest finally noticed the *Ehime Maru*'s new position north of the submarine and closing. Yet, once again, he failed to inform his team about this new information.

As the watch team prepared for the last training event, the captain invited three guests to man submarine controls to assist in the maneuver under the supervision of qualified watchstanders. "The ultimate roller coaster ride,"³⁰ the *emergency main ballast blow* shoots 4,500 psi air into the submarine's main ballast tanks, creating positive buoyancy that forces the 7,000-ton submarine to the surface. Once initiated, surfacing is unstoppable.³¹ As a sign of his comfort and confidence, the captain once again narrated the crew's activities for the visitors, as the submarine shot toward the surface. Less than a minute later, there was "a shudder," "two loud thumps," and the captain exclaimed "What the hell was that?" The submarine had collided with the *Ehime Maru*, slicing the trawler in half from starboard to port.³²

Focusing on team chemistry, the challenge of collaboration in complex and dynamically evolving high-risk environments, and the role of team learning in high-risk team operations, we will now examine individual behaviors, group dynamics, and systemic factors that contributed to this mishap – all forces shaping what that "something else" was that influenced *Greeneville*'s team performance that day. Let's start with the *Greeneville*'s captain.

In many ways, Captain Waddle was a model naval officer, known to be one of the strongest commanding officers in the submarine force.³³ A second generation career military man, Waddle attended the U.S. Naval Academy, majoring in chemistry, and he described himself as "part Boy Scout and part rebel."³⁴ Although he excelled as president of his high school National Honor Society, Eagle Scout, and captain of the football team, at the Academy he participated in the cheerleading squad because he was too small for college sports. "Years later, as captain of the *Greeneville*," Captain Waddle recalled "I'd often find that my cheerleading skills came in handy, especially when motivating my men, speaking to civic groups and colleges on behalf of the Navy, or conducting public relations cruises."³⁵ Initially focused on becoming a pilot like his father, Captain Waddle's poor eye sight forced him to select another career path. After a summer cruise on the USS *Skipjack* in 1978, he "was hooked" on submarines, not "just the amazing machine" but "the amazing crewmen." In particular, he was fascinated by the captain's authority: "I want that guy's job," he wrote in his autobiography.³⁶

After graduating from the Naval Academy in 1981, he rose quickly through the submarine officer ranks, receiving the coveted dolphin warfare specialty pin in 1986 and passing the notoriously difficult engineering exam on his first attempt. Waddle claimed to have found his "niche" when he discovered that what he "really enjoyed was motivating men, bringing out the best in them, training them, instilling in them standards of excellence, and then turning out an exceptional product for the Navy."³⁷ The future seemed bright for this young officer until personality clashes put him at odds with some of his supervisors. It became apparent that Captain Waddle had issues with conservative leaders who lacked flexibility, "stickler[s]" for the rules and regulations," and he was not afraid to say so. One captain even issued him a *Nonpunitive Letter of Caution* warning: "You need to harness your energy and apply it in areas that would be more productive."³⁸

When Captain Waddle took command of the USS *Greeneville*, his first goal was to develop a command climate in which his crew could ask “a question,” “challenge a decision,” or speak up if “they thought it was unsafe or if we were overlooking something.”³⁹ To accomplish this he removed the “fear factor” and created a “more relaxed atmosphere” of “mutual respect and trust,” developing “three tenets” that he felt “summed up our working conditions aboard the *Greeneville*: safety, efficiency, and backup.”⁴⁰ He tried other ways to make “life aboard ship as pleasant as possible” too, improving the food, providing video games for relaxation, and increasing the crews’ time off with their families. He also had a sense of humor. In 1999 at the annual Submarine Birthday Ball, the *Greeneville* entered a contest for “best table centerpiece.” Their entry was a rotating periscope popping out of a toilet commode as a recorded voice boomed, “We’re closer than you think.” They won first prize.⁴¹

Whereas Captain Waddle’s ‘part-rebel’ persona might have caused consternation with his seniors, it endeared him to the young men under his tutelage. In many ways a ‘man’s man’ and a ‘sailor’s captain,’ Waddle’s team responded to his wholesome good looks, concern for families, sense of humor, and machismo. “If we go to war,” he was known to say, “you want to go to war with me!”⁴² He pushed his submarine to its operational limits, and his men responded with eager enthusiasm, just like the Navy wanted. All of this makes the causes of *Greeneville*’s teamwork breakdown on February 9, 2001, so difficult to discern.

How can we reconcile the inconsistencies between the outstanding reputations and accolades the *Greeneville* captain and crew enjoyed prior to the collision and the team’s performance that fateful day? As one admiral noted, the “‘superficial’ indicators of readiness all looked good. The boat was clean, the crewmembers were ‘positive’ ... happy with their leadership ... and proud of their organization.”⁴³ Moreover, retention of *Greeneville* sailors was exemplary; double the navy-wide

rate. All signs of a satisfied and productive Navy submarine. Yet everyone concedes, “Something was different” that day.⁴⁴

“The crew was complacent,” Captain Waddle reflected, “including me to some degree.” Our mission was to “take these VIPs out on a lazy Friday and it was just another VIP cruise.” That lackadaisical attitude “was wrong.”⁴⁵ “One of the root causes” of the accident, the captain noted, was overconfidence. Even when a submarine crew is great, “they sometimes take for granted their expertise, and they become complacent. And that’s what happened on that day.”⁴⁶

Yet accident investigators found the explanation much more complicated than simply overconfidence and complacency. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) concluded, “The teamwork problems demonstrated on the day of the collision were due in part” to Captain Waddle’s “overly directive style,” particularly in relationship to the OOD on duty, Lieutenant Junior Grade Coen.⁴⁷ The failure of key watchstanders to effectively perform their duties and speak up, providing the vital information their team needed, resulted in the crew’s inadequate analysis of surface obstacles in the area. In particular, the rushed ascent to periscope depth, the inadequate visual search, and the emergency surfacing maneuver resulted in collision with the misidentified contact, the *Ehime Maru*.

These team failures were not errors in technical proficiency but inadequacies in leadership, communication, teamwork, and sense making. This is especially disconcerting when one considers the captain’s proclaimed efforts to develop a climate of trust and openness in which the crew could ask questions without fear of reprisal. It would be reasonable to expect that the *Greeneville*’s three tenets of safety, efficiency, and backup would mitigate any tendency toward the overconfidence and complacency Captain Waddle believed caused this accident. Yet, this did not happen.

One of the advantages of working in a team in a high-risk environment is using one’s teammates to cross-check and compare ‘mental

models' to discern what is really going on. To accomplish this, the team must not be afraid to speak up or to risk conflict as a way to discover new information and manage errors. Yet, in the *Greeneville* example there are numerous instances during which crew members noted information or observed teammates' actions that caused them concern, and then failed to communicate these concerns to their teammates. For instance, Lieutenant Sloan did not inform his team about his difficulties viewing ships through the periscope due to the haze. Petty Officer Seacrest did not share his difficulty tracking contacts. In addition, although senior officers noticed the watch team's struggles, they failed to intervene as the submarine fell further behind schedule.

One of the most glaring deficiencies in team performance was an inadequate concern for safety, a lack of backup, and a loss of situational awareness by key personnel of the submarine's watch team. For example, Lieutenant Junior Grade Coen testified that shortly before 1 p.m. he realized, given the submarine's position and the remaining schedule of activities, that they either needed to cancel some of the training maneuvers or return late to port. Although he "did not formally discuss this" with anyone, he felt it was clear "we had to do one or the other."⁴⁸ This confusion may have also led Petty Officer Seacrest to be less than diligent about tracking surface contacts and Coen to be less inquiring. Coen admits he was "aware" that Seacrest "did not have a great picture" of obstacles in the area. But he wasn't overly concerned because he "assumed that some evolutions would be cancelled" and "that a senior officer would brief him about the changes."⁴⁹ Although others within the team were similarly confused, few people spoke up. In fact, when Lieutenant Commander Gerald Pfeiffer, the submarine's executive officer (XO), tried to remind the captain about their time constraints by politely inferring – although never directly recommending – that the captain cancel the last event and return to port, Captain Waddle snapped, "I know what I'm doing."⁵⁰ This does not sound like a climate of safety, efficiency, and backup.

Such communication failures directly contributed to this maritime accident. Numerous 'red flags' can be identified throughout the day, signaling the possibility of errors and impending team breakdown: for instance, the crew falling behind schedule then rushing to complete maneuvers in order to return to port on time, trying something new under pressure with VIPs watching, imprecise communications, confusion about the sequence and plan of evolutions, and role ambiguity such as when Captain Waddle drove the submarine through the OOD.

Particularly troubling is that little effort was made to clear up these inconsistencies, thus providing the safety and backup their tenet allegedly supported. The crew seemed to just trust that the captain would take care of things. Yet this still does not completely explain the impact of Captain Waddle's "overly directive style" on teamwork that day. For that analysis, we must now examine the systemic factors contributing to this accident as a way to reconcile the inconsistencies between *Greeneville's* reputation and its performance on the day of the accident.

Although some military analysts observed that the submarine force, or 'silent service', did more to protect American soil and win the Cold War than any other branch of the U.S. military, by the late 1990s severe budget cuts were impacting operations and the construction of new submarines. "Suddenly," Captain Waddle observed, "the Navy was in the awkward position of having to validate the peacetime need for its expensive, secretive, silent service."⁵¹ Without Cold War enemies to justify their existence, the nuclear-powered submarine program had a new mission: "To survive."⁵² Public relations cruises, like the one on February 9, 2001, helped accomplish this task. Although some captains avoided these events because they believed they were an interruption, Captain Waddle "loved it," taking personal pride in supporting "requests from his senior officers" and showing off his ship and team

of sailors.⁵³ This promotion was an important systemic dynamic on the day of the accident.

In many ways, Captain Waddle was exactly the kind of 'go-Navy' cheerleader the post-Cold War, all-volunteer armed services needed. He had the attitude, charisma, and confidence that a submarine commander needed to help the 'silent service' survive in the challenging peacetime environment. Yet, ironically the same skills that the *political system* required from Captain Waddle actually undermined the *social system* and his ability to build his team on board the *Greeneville*. His competence 'crowded out' the space needed for his team members to learn and grow into their own leadership roles. In other words, Captain Waddle's impressive persona contributed to the atrophy of his crew's ability to act independently, speak up, ask questions, and authorize themselves to work collaboratively to execute the submarine's mission.

As psychodynamic researcher Debbie Bing noted, "strong leaders can 'steal' talent, ambition and thinking power from others simply by acting singularly on their own instincts and knowledge while understanding to others' ideas, strengths and the dialogue of a good team."⁵⁴ Unless the leader can be exceptionally reflective in the moment about the impact of his or her behavior on others – for instance, stepping back at times when instincts would ordinarily urge him or her to take action – it is difficult for the team to achieve the level of mindfulness and resilience needed to succeed in today's complex high-risk operating environments. This accident is an unfortunate example of the downside of charismatic leadership at work.

Although it is easy to blame this team dysfunction on the charismatic leader – just as the Navy's *Court of Inquiry* blamed Captain Waddle for "the failure of the ship's watch team to work together" to avoid the collision – the dysfunctional dynamic is actually co-created by pressures from the wider system, such as the Navy's fiscal challenges in the peacetime environment and the internal dynamics of the team itself.

As Captain Waddle's capabilities grew in response to the system's escalating demands, his team's confidence in their own skills and opinions diminished, increasing their dependency on him. It was a slow, steady spiral into team breakdown.

For example, on the day of the collision many people reported being troubled by activities on board the *Greeneville*, but few spoke up, asked questions, or intervened. Lieutenant Sloan noticed how the hazy visibility made viewing light-colored boats like the *Ehime Maru* through the periscope difficult; senior officers thought the captain's pressure on the watch team, in particular his order to get to periscope depth in five minutes, was overly aggressive; and Petty Officer Seacrest felt rushed, crowded, and lacked confidence in the accuracy of his surface picture. Yet all failed to authorize themselves to act on this information, speak up, or share it with their team in any meaningful way. One has to wonder if they were intimidated, intentionally withholding information, or just being lackadaisical, as Captain Waddle suggested.

Perhaps Lieutenant Junior Grade Coen best describes the roots of the team's befuddlement: "The commanding officer has many years of experience, many years of training." He is "the authority at sea." His "decisions are unquestioned." Coen said he thought, "Here's a man" who can "much more rapidly assess and evaluate information" than we can; if the captain "says it is safe, who is going to question that it is not safe?"⁵⁵

These observations are particularly revealing. It seemed that the captain's competency and ability to rapidly assimilate new information led the team to feel that it could not ask questions or provide input to help in the decision making. They seemed to feel like they were perpetually a step behind, and every piece of information they might have offered was already outdated, useless, or unneeded. "Surely, the captain must already know this," they began to unconsciously assume. It was a progressive cycle of team breakdown.

Contributing to this dynamic was Captain Waddle's habit of improvising without discussing his intentions with the team: for instance,

taking the submarine to 'test depth', driving the submarine through junior officers, only spending sixty-six seconds at periscope depth, and allowing civilians to man the submarine's controls. One could argue that as the submarine's commander, it was Captain Waddle's prerogative to exercise these privileges. However, one cannot ignore the implications of this improvisation, coupled with his charismatic leadership style, on the team's ability to function effectively.

These types of impromptu changes kept the team off balance, not sure what to expect next or how they could contribute. The submarine XO, Lieutenant Commander Pfeiffer, described the impact: "The first time we" exceeded "classified depths and speeds" with civilians onboard "I may have said, 'Hey, is this really' what we are 'going to do?'" Is this really "what your intentions are"? "And then it became the norm and I kind of accepted it as that's how we're going to" operate here.⁵⁶ Devaluing their own skills, the team unconsciously colluded with the captain by putting all their strengths into him as the omnipotent leader. Just like Pfeiffer, the team stopped asking questions and resigned themselves that this was 'how we're going to operate', further encouraging dependency on the charismatic leader, their captain.

Over time the team's dependency and growing inefficiency caused the captain to become increasingly frustrated. For instance, Captain Waddle admits that he pressured Lieutenant Junior Grade Coen because he was "so fricking slow." It took "forever for me to get information out of him," he complained. "So I tried to teach him."⁵⁷ By pushing him and "giving him an 'artificial time constraint,'" Captain Waddle believed he could get him to be more efficient. Exasperated by Coen's methodical nature, Captain Waddle became drawn even further into the team's operations. Lieutenant Commander Pfeiffer recalled being alarmed when Captain Waddle "got in the middle" of operations: On "all submarines you should be a little concerned when the captain" is driving the ship "instead of standing back and watching things," keeping the big picture. Yet once again, Pfeiffer failed to intervene.⁵⁸

A final repercussion of Captain Waddle's leadership style had to do with special relationships developed within his team. As the captain's competency overwhelmed the team's ability to function independently, space disappeared for the productive exploration of differences between team members. People refrained from questioning one another in public – especially challenging the captain – as an instinctive move to protect themselves from exposure and embarrassment. Meanwhile, special relationships blossomed in private.

For example, Lieutenant Commander Pfeiffer talked about how his adjoining stateroom afforded him "proximity to the captain" so that he could provide the captain "some private criticism or feedback that wouldn't be appropriate publicly."⁵⁹ Lieutenant Sloan said that, although other officers like Lieutenant Junior Grade Coen struggled with the captain's leadership style, he "had a very good working relationship" with Commander Waddle. "I knew if it was really important, I felt he would listen to me. I really felt that."⁶⁰ And Petty Officer Seacrest, who had been hand-selected to be the *command career counselor* with the important task of reenlisting the highly trained nuclear sailors, said he had "very frequent" exchanges with the captain, who took a personal interest in retaining his submarine's sailors.⁶¹ These special relationships encouraged the team to work conflicts out in private, not process issues in public as a routine aspect of team operations.

CONCLUSION

As Commander Waddle's team became more and more enamored with him, their perceptions of his omnipotence grew, 'crowding out' the team's sense of competence and self-authorization. His habit of employing unorthodox approaches and improvising without warning further pulled the team off balance. To compensate, an informal network emerged in which individuals sought connection and special relationships with the captain in private as a way to avoid conflict and the risk involved in developing public solutions. Contrary to the open

command climate the captain intended, in which the team could challenge a decision or speak up if they thought something was unsafe, a dependency dynamic emerged in which few people questioned anything.

In the absence of an explicit effort by Captain Waddle to give authority back to his team so that others could experience both the risk and the responsibility of taking it – in their own way, at their own pace – the team lost touch with their own competency and leadership skills. In an effort to please their charismatic leader, the team learned to spend an inordinate amount of energy orienting actions around the captain, rather than developing their own authority and leadership skills. In other words, rather than thinking and acting on their own, they often tried to guess what the captain would want, even in areas where they had more knowledge or expertise. Their overwhelming faith in his abilities diminished their own capacities.

A ‘fictitious truth’ developed in which Captain Waddle’s team assumed the charismatic captain knew all – the hazy visibility, poor tracking of boats in the area, the location of obstacles – while simultaneously training the OOD, driving the submarine, narrating events, and playing public relations tour guide: A herculean task, no human could achieve. Yet, the Navy as a ‘system’ had grown to expect this level of performance. This powerful, covert dynamic is the ‘something else’ that was going on aboard the *USS Greeneville*. This ‘fictitious truth’ explains the inconsistency between the outstanding reputation the *USS Greeneville* enjoyed, in general, and its performance that fateful day in February, and why the system of safety, efficiency, and backup failed to work.

In sum, the demands of the peacetime military for charismatic leaders like Captain Waddle and his resultant popularity with his crew actually put the *USS Greeneville* at risk for this team performance breakdown and “window of accident opportunity.”⁶² This potential is particularly acute in high-risk fields where the repercussions of human error can be so devastating. When leaders are extremely

competent and team members trust and respect them – like Captain Waddle and his crew aboard the *USS Greeneville* – team leaders must be ever vigilant to keep a dependent group dynamic from emerging. In a dependent team, individuals develop an almost irrational respect for their charismatic leader as all-knowing to defend against their anxieties provoked by the work environment. As in the *Greeneville* accident, team members can withhold important information, not from technical incompetence or fear of the leader’s reprisal, but because the individuals unconsciously believe these impressive leaders already know the information because they ‘know everything’.

The *Greeneville*’s watch team’s failure was to succumb to this dangerous dependency dynamic, not seeing Captain Waddle as a man with limitations but rather a deity with supreme powers. Captain Waddle’s leadership failure was to not guard against the potential that his charisma might create this dependency. Finally, the Navy’s failure was to expect so much. Until high-risk organizations, and leaders and teams within them, understand the need to balance these parameters, they risk falling prey to the seductive power of charismatic leadership.