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March 22, 2005

Punishment meted out to six in grounding of submarine

By **William H. McMichael**
Times staff writer

At least six crew members of the submarine San Francisco, apparently including three senior leaders, have been punished at a nonjudicial hearing in Guam for their roles in the Jan. 8 underwater grounding that left one sailor dead and seriously injured two dozen more, sources say.

Punished at the March 22 "commodore's mast" hearings in Guam were six crew members, a combination of enlisted, senior enlisted and officers, according to Lt. Cmdr. Jeff Davis, spokesman for the Pacific Fleet Submarine Force. He said the six each were cited by Capt. Bradley Gehrke, commander of Submarine Squadron 15, for "actions that led to the grounding."

Davis would not provide the crew members' names or positions, citing their right to privacy in nonjudicial matters, but said the charges included hazarding a vessel and dereliction of duty, both violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. He said the punishments included reductions in rate and punitive letters of reprimand. The latter is considered a career-stopper if not a career-killer.

The submarine's commanding officer at the time of the mishap, Cmdr. Kevin Mooney, was relieved Feb. 12 by 7th Fleet Commander Vice Adm. Jonathan W. Greenert.

Davis declined to provide more specific information. However, reliable sources told Navy Times that those punished included the heavily damaged submarine's executive officer, navigator, assistant navigator and three petty officers. The assistant navigator is a senior chief petty officer who had qualified for that duty. Sources also said that the three more junior sailors reportedly each lost a stripe, with one first class petty officer reduced to second class and two second classes reduced to third.

The Navy has not yet released any of its investigations into the mishap but given the initial punishments, it appears that much of the blame has been placed on the submarine's voyage planning process. In Mooney's case, Greenert concluded, according to a spokesman, that "several critical navigational and voyage planning procedures were not being implemented aboard San Francisco. By not ensuring these standard procedures were followed, Mooney hazarded his vessel."

Once a submarine's superior command orders a sub to deploy and issues a basic track or operating area, the sub's navigation team is totally responsible for properly planning the route, according to U.S. Submarine Forces in Norfolk. The actual charts and plan are prepared and approved by, in order, the sub's assistant navigator, navigator, executive officer and commanding officer, according to the Norfolk command.



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crewmembers as a result of the mishap.

The San Francisco, a nuclear attack sub, ran into an uncharted sea mount 350 miles southeast of Guam while transiting from Guam to Australia. The collision heavily damaged the bow of the 23-year-old, 362-foot attack submarine, which is being temporarily repaired in a Guam drydock to enable a transit to Hawaii this summer for further damage assessments.

The punishments come on the same week an awards ceremony is being held that includes meritorious awards for San Francisco crewmember actions taken in the wake of the mishap, Davis said. That ceremony is being held March 25 in Guam.

William H. McMichael is the Hampton Roads bureau chief for Navy Times.

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