

Helmanship Post 5/17/68

In assessing the collisions of Soviet and American warships, the temptation is strong to accuse the Russians of political mischief and then to consider the sequence as one in a continuing series of nasty, mutual and usually veiled cold-war incidents. In this case, however, the temptation should be shelved, for the true cause is to be sought not in East West tension but in the Sino-Soviet dispute.

Dialectical evidence makes plain that the captain of the *Krasin* was acting as a secret sympathizer, if not an agent, of Mao Tse-tung. He scraped the *USS Walker* not for a mean Soviet purpose, certainly not by navigational ineptitude, but to call dramatic attention to the fact that a "great helmsman," as Mao is called by those who follow him, had lost the Soviet helm.

The *Krasin* recovered quickly, dispatching a second vessel the very next day to exchange paint samples with the *Walker*. How did the Russians think to get away with a second incident? Because, you see, there was no hard evidence of a first. *Bezlednyy* means "without a trace."