

New Questions in Arnheiter Case

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CONGRESSMAN RESNICK'S "informal" public investigation into the removal of Lieutenant Commander Arnheiter from command of the destroyer Vance has now raised questions of far more gravity than those involved in the origin and method of that removal or the possible threat it poses to the system of naval command.

It has been revealed that the staff of the House Armed Services committee, having reviewed Navy documents and tapes of Navy hearings on this matter, reported that the officer had "violated many orders and regulations." Some of those alleged violations were petty or venial, and none have thus far been substantiated to the satisfaction of Resnick and other supporters of Commander Arnheiter. Yet their very listing is sufficient to raise doubts and create profound disquiet and alarm.

The report states, for instance, that the destroyer Vance under Arnheiter's command, "continually" overstepped the ten-mile limit of its patrol mission off Vietnam; that it opened bombardment on the shore after its request for such a mission had been withheld; that "on its own" it fired on a religious shrine and boarded a merchant ship contrary to orders, and that false position reports were filed to conceal such transgressions.

THESE allegations are distressingly similar to those brought forward by North Korea in the Pueblo affair, and by members of the Foreign Relations committee regarding the destroyers involved in the Gulf of Tonkin incident. One ought not, of course, judge the merits of the Arnheiter case on the evidence thus far made public, but one cannot help wondering how much trust is to be placed in official communiques that are based on field reports that might wilfully or by error conceal the facts.

The Arnheiter inquiry may not bring about a revision of the Navy's procedures for relieving its officers of command. It should by all means produce a dependable method for guaranteeing the accuracy and truth of its disclosures to Congress and the public.