

Dirty Little Wars

1. The New York docks.



Illustration 1: Vehicles of an unknown unit being loaded in New York. February 1997.

One of the most unlikely places for a war was the New York docks (although other west coast ports were also affected). The Soviets used a number of agents mainly to report the departure of REFORGER ships. These allowed the Soviets to use those submarines that had evaded the GIUK line defences to have a better idea of when to hunt for ships. It had been assumed that this work would be done mainly by satellites but ASAT warfare had reduced this coverage and the predictable pattern of the remaining satellites was easy to overcome.

As a result these Soviet agents would report the sailing of ships and ideally the units (or at least types of unit) on them. A number of Soviet Speznatz troops were also infiltrated through Mexico (and it is believed Canada) for more direct action. Two approaches were used, firstly sympathisers in the docks were used to plant explosive charges. These met with initial success, the best known being the destruction of the Rebel Yell that was carrying ammunition supplies. Here a relatively small charge ignited the stored ammunition resulting in a catastrophic explosion. The second approach used the Spetznatz to plant explosives on the outside of the hull using underwater breathing equipment. These generally did not sink the ship but caused enough damage for it to drop out of the convoy where it would be a better (i.e. less protected) target. A more subtle approach was the use of a GPS with a burst transmission device resulting in the Soviets having a clear idea where the ship was when the device was activated. It is believed that a number of TU95 Bears were used in an anti-shipping role using the SS-N-27 "Shrieker" which used a GPS signal to close near to the area using a sea skimming mode before popping up and activating a broadcast signal to home in on the target. Fortunately for NATO supplies of this missile were limited as they were so specialised (although there was an SS-N-27A Shrieker B that used active radar for the final phase).



Illustration 2: Soviet photo of the sinking of the MV Maj Bernard F Fisher which had to drop out of the convoy after an engine explosion. She was sunk within hours by the Foxtrot B413.

Initially the US response was to increase the guards at the docks, supplementing the National Guard assigned there with State Guard units. These obtained only moderate success against both categories of attackers, although at Charlestone a State Guard unit successfully engaged and killed two soviet Naval Speznatz troopers planting a GPS device on the SS Lady Texan (the retrieved device is the main source of information on this source of attack). A third diver escaped.



Illustration 3: Scene from a 2023 film recreation of the incident "Battle of New York Harbour." While widely inaccurate the equipment used was historically very accurate (although safety rules required the use of ropes on the stunt-men).

A second incident involved an underwater firefight between US Navy Seals and the Spetnaz. At least one member of each side was killed and it is believed that three Soviets were captured (all injured). Details of this incident are however very sketchy.

Despite this attacks were still being made although attacks by divers seem to have been stopped.. As a result the FBI approached Marco Donatelli who was serving a life sentence for murder while heading up the dockside mafia. Initially Donatelli refused but after one of his henchmen in the same jail met a fatal accident in the showers he relented. The closed dockside society started to pass

information to the FBI and the HRT suddenly descended on a number of premises on an early Sunday morning. A number of people were killed in shoot outs but by lunchtime eight people were in custody. After this the attacks seemed to drop off and the few remaining Soviet submarines seemed to have less success.

With the entry of Italy into the war it appears that there was a case of divided loyalties among some of the docking gangs (generally new immigrants favoured not fighting against Italy, those who had been in the states a while tended to favour the NATO position). A number of people who were speaking out as pro-Italian or pro-NATO vanished. Don Donatelli sent messages arguing that the status quo should be kept, he felt that being pro-Italian would only result in crackdowns. His appeal appears not to have worked as he was

found dead in his cell and the cameras covering the corridor appeared to have malfunctioned. Carefully selected targeting of the pro-Italian dockers by the FBI and the interment of others however swung the balance. It is however interesting to note that no acts of sabotage against ships by Italian immigrants were ever recorded. Whether this was due to the pre-emptive measures or a lack of intent is unlikely to be known.



Illustration 4: A CBS News helicopter followed a tip off and got this aerial footage of one of the arrests.