# PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

### By order of General George B. Crist, USMC, Commander in Chief, U.S. Central Command, dated 3 July 1988, Rear Admiral William M. Fogarty, USN, Director, Policy and Plans (J-5), U.S. Central Command, was appointed to conduct a formal investigation into the circumstances surrounding the downing of a commercial airliner by the USS VINCENNES on 3 July 1988.

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### During the investigation, the importance of the information being presented by way of the USS Vincennes Large Screen Displays (LSD) became apparent. Therefore, an explanation of that system’s capabilities and limitations is provided here for the benefit of the reviewer.

### The AEGIS Large Screen Display (LSD) is a part of the AEGIS Display System (ADS) and is a primary visual information source for the CO, TAO and Force Warfare Commanders. It consists of four 42″ x 42″ flat, vertically mounted, 2-dimensional displays which display the tactical picture contained in the C&D computers. This information is displayed as Navy Tactical Display System (NTDS) symbology with appropriate velocity leaders. The range scales can be varied from 8 to 2048 nautical miles. Geographic outline maps as well as operator selectable line segments, points, circles and ellipses can also be displayed. These latter items can be used to construct operational areas, geographic features, range rings, air lanes, etc. The display operator can also attach a 24 character alpha-numeric label (or "tag") to any track or point. Therefore the track classification, ID, position relative to other tracks, range, bearing, course and speed as well as position relative to geographic features or airlanes, etc., can be displayed. However, it is important to note, that altitude cannot be displayed on the LSD in real-time.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

### On 3 July 1988, the USS VINCENNES (CG 49), operating in the Southern Persian Gulf as a unit assigned to Commander, Joint Task Force Middle East, downed a civilian airliner, Iran Air Flight 655 on a routine scheduled flight from Bandar Abbas to Dubai, with two SM-2 missiles.

### The material condition, combat systems, training and personnel readiness of the ship were satisfactory.

### The following narrative summarizes the events leading up to and including the downing of Iran Air Flight 655. It is in the form of a chronology because the situation leading up to, just prior to, and during the few critical minutes from Iran Air Flight 655 take-off to downing are considered important to a full understanding of the incident. All times in the report are "Z" time.

## PRE-3 JULY SCENARIO

### In the three day period prior to the incident, there was heightened air and naval activity in the Persian Gulf. Iraq conducted air strikes against Iranian oil facilities and shipping 30 June through 2 July 1988. Iranian response was to step up ship attacks. Additionally, Iran deployed two, possibly three, F-14's from Bushehr to Bandar Abbas. U.S. Forces in the Persian Gulf were alerted to the probability of significant Iranian military activity resulting from Iranian retaliation for recent Iraqi military successes. That period covered the fourth of July holiday weekend.

### During the afternoon and evening hours of 2 July 1988 and continuing into the morning of 3 July 1988, Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) armed small boats (Boghammers, and Boston Whalers) positioned themselves at the western approach to the Strait of Hormuz (SOH). From this position, they were challenging merchant vessels, which has been a precursor to merchant ship attacks. On 2 July 1988, USS ELMER MONTGOMERY was located sufficiently close to a ship attack in progress as to respond to a request for distress assistance and to fire warning shots to ward off IRGC small boats attacking a merchant vessel.

## 3 JULY SURFACE ENGAGEMENT

### On the morning of 3 July 1988, USS ELMER MONTGOMERY was on patrol in the northern portion of Strait of Hormuz Western Patrol Area (SOHWPA). At approximately 0330Z, USS MONTGOMERY observed seven small Iranian gunboats approaching a Pakistani merchant vessel. The small boats were reported by USS MONTGOMERY to have manned machine gun mounts and rocket launchers. Shortly thereafter, USS MONTGOMERY observed a total of 13 Iranian gun boats breaking up into three groups. Each group contained 3 to 4 gun boats with one group of four gun boats taking position off USS MONTGOMERY's port quarter. At 0411Z, USS MONTGOMERY heard the gun boats over bridge to bridge challenging merchant ships in the area. USS MONTGOMERY then heard 5 to 7 explosions coming from the north. At 0412Z, "Golf Sierra" (COMDESRON 25) directed USS VINCENNES to proceed north to the vicinity of USS MONTGOMERY and investigate USS MONTGOMERY's report of small boats preparing to attack a merchant ship. USS VINCENNES's helo (Ocean Lord 25/LAMPS MK-III helo) on routine morning patrol, was vectored north to observe the Iranian small boat activity. USS VINCENNES was also monitoring a routine maritime patrol of an Iranian P-3 operating to the west. At approximately 0615Z, the USS VINCENNES's helicopter was fired upon by one of the small boats. USS VINCENNES then took tactical command of USS MONTGOMERY and both ships proceeded to close the position of the helicopter and the small boats at high speed. As USS VINCENNES and USS MONTGOMERY approached the position of the small boats, two of them were observed to turn towards USS VINCENNES and USS MONTGOMERY. The closing action was interpreted as a demonstration of hostile intent. USS VINCENNES then requested and was given permission by CJTFME to engage the small boats with gunfire. At approximately 0643Z, USS VINCENNES opened fire and was actively involved in the surface engagement from the time Iranian Air Flight 655 took off from Bandar Abbas through the downing of Iran Air Flight 655.

### During the course of the gun engagement of the Iranian small boats, the USS VINCENNES, at approximately 0654Z, had maneuvered into a position 1 mile west of the centerline of civilian airway Amber 59. The USS SIDES, transiting from east to west through the SOH, was approximately 18 miles to the east and became involved in the evolving tactical situation.

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# FINDINGS OF FACT

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## AIR ENGAGEMENT

### FACTS BEARING ON THE COMMANDING OFFICER'S DECISION

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#### CAPT Rogers recalled having the following indicators in declaring track 4131 hostile and deciding to engage:

##### F-14s had been recently moved to Bandar.

##### Iranian fighters had flown coincident with surface engagement on 18 April 1988.

##### The aircraft was not responding to verbal warnings over IAD or MAD.

##### There had been warnings of an increased threat over the July 4th weekend.

##### Increased hostile activity had been predicted for the 48 hours following recent Iraqi military victory.

##### The aircraft was not following the air corridor in the same manner as other commercial aircraft had been seen consistently to behave (i.e. flying exactly on the centerline).

##### It was flying at a reported altitude which was lower than COMAIR were observed to fly in the past.

##### Track 4131 was reported to be increasing in speed.

##### Track 4131 was reported to be decreasing in altitude.

##### Track 4131 was CBDR to USS VINCENNES and USS MONTGOMERY.

##### Track 4131 was reported by USS VINCENNES's personnel squawking Mode II-1100 which correlates with an F-14.

##### No ESM was reflected from track 4131, however, F-14s can fly "cold-nose" (no emitters).

##### F-14s have an air-to-surface capability with Maverick and modified Eagle missiles.

##### The aircraft appeared to be maneuvering into an attack position.

##### Pk of on board defensive missile systems diminishes inside 10 NM.

##### Visual identification of the aircraft was not feasible.