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Sonar Technician 2nd Class Steven Casar, USS Providence crewman, on the possibility of going to war.

## Submariners ready for whatever comes

From A1

And the fact that the submarine USS Providence deployed 10 days ahead of schedule last month — what the Navy characterizes as a "surge" — made the process even easier.

"That put purpose into the deployment," Schoulberg said. "They don't change deployment schedules on a whim."

For different reasons, most of the men of the Providence seem to share Schoulberg's readiness to enter the fray.

"We work up the same, whether it's to prepare for a routine exercise off the Connecticut coast or this kind of operation," said Chief Mess Specialist Chris Nailon. "But the workups give us a great degree of confidence in each other."

The Providence is patrolling in the eastern Mediterranean, armed to participate in a strike against Iraq if the United States goes to war. The crewmen know Iraq has few weapons that can reach them, though they are guarding their location carefully.

Eighteen months ago, the Providence fired some of the opening shots against the Taliban and the terrorists they harbored in Afghanistan. Lt. Eric Svensson, the weapons officer on the Providence, was on board for that strike in October 2001.

"The beginning of this deployment just seems like a continuation of the last one," Svensson said.

Mess Specialist 2nd Class David Rojas also was aboard the Providence for the earlier operation. On Sept. 11, 2001, the boat was headed for home after a relatively uneventful deployment, so the combat operation was a surprise.

"But I don't think we feel any extra pressure because we know going into this one that it could be a combat mission," Rojas said. In fact, he said, it's a point of pride that the Providence has again been called into service.

"I've heard stories about guys who did a whole naval career and never got to do what we did, never experienced what we did, on the last deployment," Rojas said. "And now we're getting ready to do it again."

Sonar Technician 2nd Class Steven Casar said that knowing in advance that it's likely to be a combat mission doesn't make deploying any more difficult.

"I think it kind of makes it easier to deal with, because you're already prepared for it," said Casar. "You have time to think about it, to get ready for what you have to do. We can't be sure anything is going to happen, but if it does you're more prepared for it."

The captain of the Providence, Cmdr. Jon Kan, said that in the last deployment the submariners did not learn about the full extent of the damage the terrorists had inflicted upon the United States until they returned from their combat operation.

"Having seen all that now, I think they've come back with a real commitment to the mission," Kan said. "They have a lot of confidence going into it."

About 30 percent of the crew has turned over since the Providence returned from its last deployment, Kan said, but he has no reservations about his men's capabilities.

"We go through a certification in each mission area before every deployment, and that process is about a billion times harder than the actual deployment," Kan said. "If you can get through the certification, you can get through the deployment."

In addition, training has intensified since the boat left Groton in early February; the weapons department, for instance, has conducted several 36-hour exercises simulating the planning and execution of a missile strike.

"By the time we get out here, we're veterans of the operation," Kan said.

In fact, he said, the officers must supervise training carefully to make sure it's not overdone, balancing it against the crew's other duties. There are daily briefings on crew fatigue.

"You may be setting a guy up to not get any sleep for a day and a half if you're not careful, and they won't say anything, they'll just try to work through it," Kan said. "So it becomes a big obligation on our part to make sure we're looking out for them."  
*b.hamilton@theday.com*

## Sailors stay connected with their families

*Support group helps to keep morale elevated among crewmen at sea*

By ROBERT A. HAMILTON  
Day Staff Writer

Aboard the USS Providence — As he prepared to leave for a six-month combat mission, Lt. j.g. Will Wiley's wife handed him a stack of index cards, one for each day he would be gone.

"It might be a joke, or a comment from our dog, or a picture of her," said Wiley who works in the engineering department. "It's kind of her way of talking to me. I have to flip it over every day. And I have to try not to cheat and flip over more than one day at a time."

He said he almost feels guilty that he left her only notes for Valentine's Day and other holidays, as well as her birthday, March 9.

"But at least I got to call her on her birthday, so I got major points for that. I told her that I had the captain pull in especially for her birthday," Wiley said.

Lt. Eric Svensson's wife gave him a box of pictures when he left, and later mailed him videos of the last four episodes of "Joe Millionaire" and a couple of other TV shows he missed.

The Providence Family Support Group provided "halfway night" gifts for every member of the crew to mark the midpoint of the deployment, as well as a calendar filled with messages, including notes about crewmen's birthdays and other events and such general messages as "Our Heroes."

"It kind of keeps us reminded of what's going on back home," said Chief Mess Specialist Chris Nailon. Sailors often pin up the personal messages near their bunks.

Cmdr. Jon Kan, the captain of the Providence, said the boat's Family Support Group has been great about sponsoring other morale-boosting projects.

Crew morale is directly tied to how close the crewmen stay to their families, he said — the men who are happy with their home lives are generally more efficient and effective on the job.

"You want to keep that contact," Kan said. "It can be so tough to maintain, but we work hard at it."

Advances in submarine technology and equipment, including the Providence's new High Data Rate antenna, have made two-way communications easier.

Submariners were once limited to one 40-word message every month. During the trip across the Atlantic, crewmen were allowed to send and receive e-mails daily. Even when communications are restricted to avoid giving away the boat's location, crewmen can often send and receive once a week.

"In some ways, it's actually easier out here," Kan said. "We take good care of the crew, and the ship is in good shape. The families are dealing with cars and plumbing and water heaters,

and you can't always predict what's going to happen."

Sometimes, though, crewmen find out about problems they can't help solve from a submarine 5,000 miles away from home. In an e-mail he received after a recent winter storm back home, Svensson learned that the porch on his house had collapsed under the weight of ice and snow.

"The good thing about living on the base is that in the Navy community, everyone is going through the same thing, so they support each other really well," he said. "My wife has been through this before, and she's handled whatever came up. My wife is tough and can deal with it."

*b.hamilton@theday.com*

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## U.S. Navy rescues Iraqi fishermen from boat sinking in Persian Gulf

Aboard the USS Kitty Hawk (AP) — U.S. sailors responding to a radio distress call rescued eight Iraqi fishermen after their boat sank Thursday in the southern Persian Gulf, a senior Navy officer said.

The guided missile frigate USS Gary responded to a mayday call from a boat the caller identified as the Captain Muhamad shortly before 6 p.m., said Capt. Mike Mahon, the officer responsible for the frigate's squadron. He said the fishermen were in good condition and did not need medical attention.

The 30-yard fishing boat was in international waters about 15 nautical miles from the Gary in the southern part of the Gulf when it issued a general distress call saying it was taking on water and was in danger of sinking.

The Gary initially sent a helicopter, which found the boat foundering in seas with winds of 25-30 knots. But the helicopter couldn't start a rescue because the boat's small size gave the

air crew "no place to work from," Mahon said.

When the Gary was close enough, it sent sailors to the stricken vessel in a small inflatable boat.

Two of the fishermen were rescued from the water, the last of them at about 10 p.m., he said.

Mahon said the Iraqis were searched and taken aboard the Gary, where they would be held in isolation and under observation, but probably not locked up.

The sunken boat's captain requested he and his crew be returned to Iraq, Mahon said. A process to do so was not clear, but would probably involve sending the men to a third country, which would then return them to Iraq.

The Gary is normally part of the Kitty Hawk's battle group, but is not part of the military mobilization against Iraq. It is currently tasked with escorting merchant ships through the Strait of Hormuz.

## Suspected suicide bomber blows himself up near home of prominent Kurdish politician

Sulaymaniyah, Iraq (AP) — A suspected suicide bomber blew himself up near the home of a prominent Kurdish politician in northern Iraq on Thursday night, officials said.

No other casualties were reported.

Security officials at the scene said they believed the man was a member of the Islamic extremist group Ansar al-Islam, which the United States has accused of harboring fugitives from Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network.

But the city's security chief, Sarkawt Kuba, said the suspected bomber belonged to another group, which he declined to identify.

The bombing took place on a street behind the home of Kosrat Rasool Ali, a top official in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, which rules the eastern half of the Kurdish au-

tonomous area in northern Iraq. The explosion broke windows in nearby apartment buildings.

A neighborhood resident said he was watching television in his home when he heard the explosion and ran downstairs.

"I saw a man whose body was broken into two pieces," said Abdul Qader Mohammed, who added that he saw a handgun near the body. "He was wearing a scarf around his face and only his eyes were showing."

The secular government and Islamic militants in northern Iraq have for months fought a low intensity war of suicide bombings, assassinations and exchanges of mortar fire.

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