

# Submarine USS Providence, Crew Edge Closer To War

*From A1*  
2nd Class David Rojas.  
"You need to go cook something," King growled in return.  
Early Sunday morning, the Providence prepared to submerge in the Red Sea after a 36-hour transit from the Mediterranean, where it will wait for the president's orders.

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Most of the sailors on the Providence got only a few days notice that they would be leaving the Mediterranean Sea for the Red Sea, which left Lt. Cmdr. Joseph A. Baldi, the navigator, only a short time to prepare a briefing that accounted, minute by minute, for the trip.

He warned the crew that showers would be shut off during the passage, and everyone groaned.

"We want to be on our toes the whole time," Baldi said. "Rest now for what you can expect to happen later."

The sub's captain, Cmdr. Jon Kan, warned everyone against wearing ball caps with the name of the Providence or anything else that would identify the ship. And he reaffirmed Baldi's advice about getting some sleep.

"We're going to be busy on every watch. It's going to be dark. It's going to be confusing," Kan said. "Get rest."

Lt. Carl Koch, the "Chop," or supply officer, is acting as officer of the deck when the Providence is waiting its turn to enter the canal. Suddenly dozens of northbound ships begin to emerge, weaving in and out of the southbound ships at anchor.

"Take two forks and put the tines together and you get a sense of what was happening, and we were right in the middle of it," Koch said.

While most of the ships are considerably closer than the 20,000 yards separation that submarine officers like to keep, he said, "it makes the watch go by fast. Time flies when you're having fun."

There are several U.S. Navy warships entering the canal at the same time, including submarines. The lights of Port Said guide the ship toward the opening early Saturday morning. Koch intently monitors the other ships that are jockeying for position.

"When I'm on the scope, it's like when you're driving through a scenic

■ *USS Providence crew members soaked up some sunshine during a stint on deck known as "steel beach" while the submarine paused briefly on its journey to the Red Sea on Saturday.*



TIM COOK / The Day

area on the highway — no matter how many times someone says, 'oh, look at that,' you're thinking, 'no, I'll keep an eye on the cars.'" Koch said. "There's not a lot of time to look around."

"It's a big rush, that's for sure," Koch said. And, he and other crewmen said, you never know which one of the other ships in the area might be a threat, so you try to watch them all.

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As the ship stopped in Great Bitter Lake, most of the sailors were allowed to go out and sun themselves if they weren't on watch. Senior Chief Electronic Technician Wayne Gilbert, though, had another idea about how to use the time.

"All right, where's my deck seaman?" Gilbert wondered aloud. "Break out some paint."

Fire Control Technician 2nd Class Kevin Bojanowski and a younger sailor came topside with cans of black Rustoleum paint and began hunting down spots where the paint had peeled.

Though the decks were fairly

crowded, less than one-third of the crew was topside during the "Steel Beach" call because some people were on duty, in training or working on certifications.

"Sometimes when we're home in port we don't get to see the sun much, either," said Ens. Michael J. Vulpis. "Especially in the winter, because you come in at 4 or 5 in the morning, and it's dark, and you don't leave the ship until 5 or 6 at night, and it's dark."

Baldi shrugged off comparisons between the Providence, where sun is a rarity, and some of the surface ships that are making the transit with it, which get sun nearly every day.

"They can have the sun — and they can have the seas, too, in a North Atlantic storm," Baldi said. Submarines, he noted, can go deep in storm-tossed seas and ride out the weather in comfort.

In the distance, another submarine was dwarfed by the two cargo ships that were flanking it, one of them with more than 1,000 containers visible on its decks. The 360-foot, 6,900-ton submarine looked tiny by comparison.

"That's how other people see us," said the executive officer, Lt. Cmdr. Thad E. Nisbett, using the juxtapositioning to drive home the point to his crew that submarines, which ride so low in the water, have to be careful of ships around them because they are easy to overlook.

On one finger peninsula there were beautiful, red-tiled stucco villas with tennis courts and piers and palm trees. A few miles later the scene was replaced by military troops in tanks and armored personnel carriers, and military outposts where guards manned large-caliber machine guns. Overhead, two Russian-built helicopters, operated by the Egyptian Army, buzzed the canal repeatedly.

Onlookers watched from shore on park benches, some of them in Western dress, many in traditional Arab garb. One sailor wondered how many were counting hulls for intelligence purposes.

"I wish I had more zoom to get that coastline better," said Electrician's Mate 2nd Class Alex Sanders as he focused his Olympus D-370 camera on the shore.

Seaman Recruit Joseph E. Hewitt enjoyed a few minutes of basking before heading back to his job in the galley.

"This is the first time I've seen sunlight in a month, since we left Groton," Hewitt said. The ship stopped in Souda Bay, Crete, a week earlier, but his duties as a food services attendant left him no time to get off the ship except at night.

Though Hewitt trained for more than a year at Basic Enlisted Submarine School and at Electronics Technician School, like every newly arrived enlisted man he had to do a stint clearing and cleaning dishes and pouring drinks.

"It's frustrating," Hewitt said, because he wants to be doing the job he was trained to do. But everyone has to take a turn in the mess.

Word passed through the crew that the holdup in Great Bitter Lake was due to a ship that grounded on the southbound passage. There was little sympathy later when it was confirmed that it was a French cargo ship; too many of the sailors have read too many

times about how the French have argued against military action in Iraq.

Baldi was less concerned with the nationality of the unlucky vessel than with what it was likely to do to the schedule. The northbound traffic would be delayed long enough that the next southbound ships would be delayed as well, causing a domino effect.

"It'll probably take two days to get everything back on schedule," Baldi said.

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The southern end of the canal was looking verdant when word came down that the engineer, Lt. Matt Mulcahy, was looking for a definition of "a cable," the nautical measurement used by the Egyptian pilot, the third and last pilot that the Providence would take aboard for the trip.

"The eng' calls down to control and says, 'How long is a cable?' And I say, 'Which cable? We've got lots of cables down here.' And he says, 'No, cable as in the nautical term,'" Lt. j.g. Will Wiley, chemical and radiological controls assistant, recounted later.

Wiley ran off and found the term in Dutton's Navigation, the bible of the bridge. A cable measures about 200 yards.

Wylie said that as the ships were leaving the canal, he also recognized that the ship in front of them was the USS Donald Cook, named for a Marine Corps colonel who was taken prisoner in Vietnam on Dec. 31, 1964.

Wylie wears a stainless steel POW/MIA wristband for Cook that he obtained during his sophomore year at the U.S. Naval Academy in 1998. It's his own show of respect to the tradition of naval service.

Cook had a reputation for not giving in to the enemy on anything. When his captors held a 9 mm pistol to his head to try to intimidate him, Cook just started listing the parts of the gun.

He was later awarded the Medal of Honor based on the tales that came home about his heroism, but the colonel was never returned and his body was never accounted for.

"A lot of people don't realize we still have 1,400 guys from that war still unaccounted for," Wylie said. "It's pretty ironic that we're just seven-and-a-half cables (about 1,500 yards) behind the guy right now."

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## Providence sailors stress difference between Islamic faith and terrorism

By ROBERT A. HAMILTON  
Day Staff Writer

Aboard the USS Providence — As the United States prepares to wage war on a Muslim country, crewmen on one of the warships that would fire the opening shots are seeking to educate their shipmates that there is nothing in Islam that advocates terrorism.

"We're not trying to convert anybody, we're just trying to erase the stereotypes," said Mess Specialist 1st Class G. Dwayne Davis, who helped organize the Islamic study group that met this week for the first time aboard this submarine, now in the Red Sea.

He shrugged off suggestions that perhaps, as the Navy prepares to strike Iraq in an attempt to dislodge Saddam Hussein from power, it might be the wrong time to build support for Islam, which has become so closely linked to terrorism.

"I think this is the perfect time," Davis said. "Once we decided to start the study group, I decided that's one of the things I wanted to do, to get rid of some of these misconceptions. A Muslim is someone who submits to the will of God."

Seaman Jalil-Ali Shakur, raised Muslim in the Spanish Harlem section of New York City, is working with Davis on what they hope will be weekly study sessions.

"Especially with all the other things that are going on, I don't see any reason not to do it now," Shakur said. "A lot of people are illiterate about the faith."

The two men said they were unshaken by the fact that only two others in the 140-person crew attended the first session. Several others have asked about the group, they said, and they expect interest will pick up as the deployment continues.

"Islam is all about faith," Shakur



TIM COOK / The Day

■ *USS Providence crew members, from left, Joe Mitchell, Jalil-Ali Shakur and Dwayne Davis discuss the importance of religion in their lives as part of the boat's Islamic studies group during operations in the Red Sea on Sunday.*

said. "Islam teaches you to love all. We consider all our brothers. We're going to be together for awhile, so we have time to lay the basic groundwork."

Davis, who was raised Catholic, said his faith's turning point came in 1995 when he participated in the Million Man March in Washington, D.C., and met a number of Muslim men who impressed him with their faith.

"To me, growing up in the Christian community, we go to church, we get out of church and that's it," Davis said. "The only time we're holy people is when we're in church. Islam stresses religion as a way of life."

He started to attend a mosque in Hartford two or three times a week, and again during a tour at the Recruit Training Center Great Lakes in Illinois. Then, during a deployment with Providence in 2001, Davis went ashore in Bahrain during a port call, where he saw his first devout Muslims.

"When it's time for prayer, when they hear the call for prayer, basically the whole town shuts down," he said. "I saw people getting out of their cars and putting their prayer rugs down next to the road."

Davis bristles at media coverage that has equated Islam with terrorism just because some criminals have cloaked themselves in the faith.

"There are bad seeds in any religion," he said. "That is not what Islam is about. You talk to anybody who understands Islam."

Davis also brushes aside questions about his current profession, a Navy sailor on a warship in the Middle East. He said he took an oath to follow orders lawfully given, and intends to fulfill that oath.

But he adds: "I don't want to necessarily say I agree with everything that's going on."

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