

AMERICA AT WAR

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A perplexing silence greets war on Iraq

FOUR SPANISH-SPEAKING countries are among the 40 nations in "the coalition of the willing" supporting the U.S. war in Iraq. They are Spain, Colombia, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Nevertheless, little has been heard in these last convulsive weeks from the local Spanish-speaking community, including people from those four countries, about the war. In the customary public venues, such as the letters to the editor pages of the newspaper, protest rallies and church or community forums, the absence of Hispanic or Latino surnames and voices is not unusual.

But this is war, and in New London, where the Spanish-speaking community is the dominant minority group, roughly 20 percent of the city's population, the silence is a bit perplexing.

Resurreccion Espinosa, raised in Spain, has lived here for more than two decades. She spoke on Wednesday with her elderly parents and a friend from childhood, all living in Spain. "My parents are concerned about whether I'm safe or not," she says. "I didn't want to talk about the war with them. My friend was a little bit upset about the war. There had been a lot of protests in Spain. She does not think the government will get involved with the war. They just want Hussein gone."

Espinosa opposes war. She's concerned about living conditions for the people of Iraq, but says war won't resolve things. She's happy to hear others speak out.

"The Spanish-speaking community here are Puerto Ricans, who are American citizens," she says, implying support of U.S. policies. "The rest are not citizens, except for a handful who are professionals."

The Rev. Daniel Martino, pastor of the First Hispanic Baptist Church in New London, where the congregation of 150 or so includes people from Colombia and El Salvador, says the war has not surfaced within the church. "We prefer to pray," says Martino, who is from Puerto Rico. "We support the people from our church in the military. We have a lot of them."

Martino says he does not applaud President Bush's ultimatum to Saddam Hussein. "Saying you have 48 hours to leave is kind of arrogant," says the pastor. "I am personally against the war. It was too fast, too soon to get into war. I'm not really sure what the real intentions, the motivations are."

But Martino still has not sermonized on the war. Neither has his congregation pressed him.

Another community leader, Alejandro Melendez-Cooper, from Peru, says Spanish-speaking people have the same opinions as anyone else, and if they've chosen to keep them private, so be it. He leads an organization, the Hispanic Alliance, trying to enhance participation in the greater community. But Melendez-Cooper also avoids a public stand on the war. "I am a negotiator," he says. "If I take sides, my voice will be not valid."

Maria Gallagher, who lives in Oakdale and works as a family advocate at the St. Francis Hospital Children's Center in Hartford, is from Colombia, though she left her homeland as a child. Still, she has watched her native country's struggles with internal miseries, especially the drug trade, and says Colombia has remained relatively supportive of the U.S.

"I have mixed feelings," she says about the war. "I married a military person, and he participated in the Gulf War. I come from a belief that freedom is very important. On the other hand, I have sons of the age to fight. It is frightening to think about it."

She has no problem with Colombia's backing the U.S. in the war. "Many people who have come to this country came for these freedoms," she says.

Two other women from Spain, one on the faculty at Connecticut College and the other a researcher at Pfizer, chose not to talk publicly about the war or their homeland's support. Their privacy is their right, of course, and in this anxious season, they are not alone.

This is the opinion of Steven Slosberg.



ETC (SS) Craig Bright conducts a navigation training session in the crew's mess area aboard the USS Providence while operating in the Red Sea on Wednesday.

TIM COOK
The Day

DISPATCHES AT SEA

EDITOR'S NOTE: Day reporter Robert A. Hamilton and photographer Tim Cook are aboard a Navy submarine covering the war with Iraq.

On Providence, Navigation's A Tricky Trade

Crewmen must know the details of foreign coasts

By ROBERT A. HAMILTON
Day Staff Writer

Aboard the USS Providence — When you leave Groton in a U.S. Navy submarine headed for the Red Sea, Mapquest.com isn't going to be much help.

You need to know which countries claim 12 miles of territorial waters (most of them) and which ones claim just 6 (Greece). You need to know location of ordnance drop zones, where if you scrape the bottom your boat could become airborne. You need to know where the

currents are strongest.

But most of all, if you're in the navigation team, you need to know where the charts are stored.

"We've got thousands of charts on board, stored anywhere there's room, but the guys know where they all are," said Electronics Technician Chief Craig A. Bright, assistant navigator on the Providence, during a charts training course this week. "We're not completely in the electronic era yet."

Now that war with Iraq has begun, the Navigation Department takes on even greater importance. The boat has to be in a certain place at a certain time, operating at a certain speed and course, for the missiles to arrive on time and on target, Bright said, and the sailors in

navigation will make that happen.

Another skill Providence has put to use on this deployment is water space management — basically staying out of the path of another submarine.

The Navy has acknowledged that other submarines are in the sea that separates Africa from Saudi Arabia, though the exact number is classified.

"There's times when two submarines can operate in the same column of water at the same time," Bright said. "We're shallow and they're deep, we're doing this and they're doing something else."

Water space management allows submarines to operate safely by giving them rules that will keep them from going bump.

Even when submarine operating areas butt up against each other, there are ways to keep them apart.

For instance, submarines in adjoining areas might be restricted to no deeper than 700 feet, he said. So if you have to get a crewman off for medical reasons, you can drop to 800 feet and go beneath them, Bright said.

What about boats not operated by our Navy, one sailor asks.

Lt. Cmdr. Joseph Baldi, the Providence navigator, said in its current operating area, NATO compares submarine schedules to make sure none are in conflict, and the chance of encountering another country's submarine is low.

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'Goodbye' the hardest word for sub crew, families

By ROBERT A. HAMILTON
Day Staff Writer

Aboard the USS Providence — Six months away from home is tough for couples to take, particularly when you're on a warship in a combat zone, but how do you explain it to a pre-schooler?

Lt. j.g. Jeff Yackeren, who enlisted in the Navy in 1991 and received his commission in 1999, said his wife grew up in an Air Force family, and understood the nature of service-related separations.

His son was just 2 when he finished his last deployment in November 2001, and was too young when he deployed seven months earlier to understand much.

"This deployment is harder, because my son's 4 this time, and there's been a lot more bonding going on, and my wife is due about the time I get back," Yackeren said. "We're hoping I get back in time for the birth, but I'm keeping my fingers crossed."

To make it worse, his son had a severe earache the day before deploying, and they spent four hours at the Naval Ambulatory Care Clinic getting treatment. Then the dog was injured just before he left, and his wife sprained her ankle the first day he was gone.

"I tell my son, 'Daddy's going to be home when the baby comes,' but he doesn't understand when that is, so he's always asking his mom, 'when's the baby coming?'" Yackeren said.

"After Sept. 11 happened, we told them, 'Daddy has to go save the world,' and we told them the same thing for this deployment."

David Rojas, father of children ages 8, 5, 3, 2 and 5 months

Chief Electronics Technician Craig A. Bright's children are older — girls 14 and 12, and a boy, 11 — so they understood only too well what was happening.

"I still sit down and talk to each of them, individually and as a group," Bright said. "Certainly, there were times when you think, 'is it really worth missing out on your family and six months of their growing up?'"

"After this deployment, I leave here for shore duty, and then I'm putting in for retirement," Bright said. "I've missed a lot of them growing up, doing this, and I need to give them a little back. I owe them some time."

Saying goodbye to children is going to be difficult under any circumstances. But the normal stress of separation was compounded because Providence unexpectedly deployed 10 days early, with only a couple of days notice.

"Ten days doesn't seem like a lot, but the last 10 days before a deployment is usually your quiet time, the time you spend with your family and taking care of last-minute jobs around the house," said the captain, Cmdr. Jonathan H. Kan. "And the 10 days meant

they lost their last two weekends."

When the children are young, you worry that they will forget you while you are gone.

"My 5-year-old, she was just 3 the last time I got back, and didn't take to me for two or three weeks," said Mess Specialist 2nd Class David Rojas, the father of five children, ages 8, 5, 3, 2 and 5 months, with his wife of 11 years.

"She'd come to me but she was timid. It was like she had to get to know me all over again," Rojas said. "The two youngest ones, they were just happy to see me from the start."

But Rojas said he's come up with a way to put the long separation into perspective.

"After Sept. 11 happened, we told them, 'Daddy has to go save the world,' and we told them the same thing for this deployment," Rojas said with a grin.

Lt. Eric Svensson has two boys.

"The 2-year-old I really didn't have to tell," Svensson said. "I've been gone almost half his life already, so I think he's used to me being gone." The youngest had just started to talk and was saying "daddy" by the time he left.

For his 4-year-old, his wife started a chain

of construction paper links. They will make one more link every day, which will help him learn to count and keep his mind on the return date.

Svensson and his wife were going to make a chain of 180 links before he left, for each of the 180 days they are scheduled to be gone. Then they remembered that in the 2001 deployment Providence was delayed returning more than a month.

"She was worried if we got extended, they'd get to the end of the chain and he'd want to know where Daddy was," Svensson said.

Chief Hospital Corpsman Michael "Doc" Shoulberg said in some ways, the deployment is tougher on him than on his daughters, 9 and 11.

"I feel like they need their dad. They're fully self sufficient, but I want to be there for them," Shoulberg said. "I started telling them last summer, that I was going to be leaving again, and be gone until after the summer. They just say, 'OK, whatever you say, Dad,' and wander off."

When they were younger, though, it was heartbreaking. He recalled returning from a deployment when his oldest daughter was about 4 years old, and quickly got used to having him around the house.

"The first time my wife dropped me off at the boat," Shoulberg said, "she grabbed my hand and wouldn't let go, like she was afraid I was going to be gone another six months."

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NEWS IN BRIEF

U.S. seizing \$1.74B in Iraq assets; money will aid Iraqi citizens

Washington — The Bush administration is seizing \$1.74 billion in Iraqi assets already frozen in the United States, saying it will use the money for humanitarian purposes in Iraq. President Bush signed an executive order Thursday directing the Treasury Department to take the action. Treasury officials believed it marked the second time since World War II that the government confiscated financial assets. The assets, which were frozen by the government in 1990, are currently sitting in accounts at 18 banks, including Citigroup, Bank of America and Wachovia, in the United States. Bush's order "authorizes Treasury to marshal the assets and to use the funds for the benefit and welfare of the Iraqi people," said Treasury Secretary John Snow. It is envisioned that the funds would actually flow to the Iraqi people once Saddam Hussein is ousted from power,

Treasury officials said.

Security fortified at several U.S. nuclear power plants

With traffic-stalling vehicle checks on interstates, armed patrols inside subway tunnels and briefcase inspections at heartland statehouses, Americans encountered a new level of heightened security on the home front Thursday. Most seemed to take the inconvenience in stride. Nuclear power plants were a special focus. Security was fortified at generating stations in Maryland, Alabama and Ohio, where tours of the Davis-Besse facility in Port Clinton were canceled following the first round of airstrikes in Iraq. At the nation's largest nuclear plant, the Palo Verde station west of Phoenix, National Guard troops carrying M-16s stood guard. It might have been a terrorist target, U.S. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee on Thursday, though he declined to provide details about intelligence reports.

U.N.'s Annan says Iraqi oil money should buy food, medicine

United Nations — U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed Thursday using money from Iraqi oil sales to buy food and medicine for Iraqis and refugees fleeing the U.S.-led war. But he argued that the United States bears "primary responsibility" for humanitarian assistance during and after the military strike. The United States and Britain are drafting a similar plan to buy humanitarian relief supplies from the \$40 billion oil-for-food account. The U.N. oil-for-food program was adopted in 1995 to help ordinary Iraqis cope with sanctions imposed after Saddam Hussein's forces invaded Kuwait in 1990. The program has provided assistance to about 60 percent of Iraq's 22 million people, but its operation was halted this week when U.N. staff and outside monitors who had been checking oil shipments left the country ahead of the U.S. military strike.

Authorities step up search for Iraqi sleeper cells in U.S.

Washington — Federal agencies increased border inspections, put nuclear plants on heightened alert and stepped up the search for possible Iraqi terrorist "sleeper cells" in a move to war footing Thursday. As the U.S. assault on Iraq intensified, Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge told members of Congress that there had been no incidents in the United States in retaliation. He said the "code orange" alert status imposed this week would stay in effect. FBI agents, in an attempt to head off possible retaliation for the war, began fanning out across the country to interview thousands of people born in Iraq, the agency said. The FBI also said it also wanted to try to prevent hate crimes against people of Iraqi heritage. The FBI's 56 bureaus were put on around-the-clock operation. "We are running down every lead, responding to every threat," Director Robert Mueller said.