

# Providence Crew's Training Is Put To The Test

From A1

With the announcement, "Man battle stations, strike," there was no hesitation, no hint of surprise on the Groton-based Providence. Crewmen walked briskly to their assigned posts and prepared to do the jobs for which they have trained for their entire Navy careers.

Minutes later, Kan came on the public address system to praise the rapid response and to outline the strike that was planned.

When the first missile left the torpedo tube, a cheer went up from the crew's mess, barely audible from the control center.

"We've worked very hard to be a part of this operation," Kan said later. "They have a lot to be proud of, and you can be sure we will keep reminding them of that because the achievement today was not trivial."

In control, the reaction was more muted. A few enlisted men sat with their hands folded. Officers stood unmoving and unspeaking. The men standing watch did not take their eyes from their computer screens.

"Way to go, men," the captain said softly, his voice carrying across the silent room.

The captain ordered most of the crew back to its usual state of readiness, and within minutes people were back into their routines, preparing for training scheduled the next day and cranking up the AC/DC song "Dirty Deeds" on the wardroom audio system.

"What surprises me is they shot, and five minutes later we were setting up for dinner, as though everything was back to normal," said Chief Mess Specialist Chris Nailon. "Incredible."

Back in the chief's quarters, Chief Hospital Corpsman Michael "Doc" Shoulberg noted that this time combat was a bit easier than his first experience, with a Marine division in Desert Storm in 1991.

"Last time was from 25 yards," he said. "And they were shooting back."

Normally there are eight to 10 people in the control center; during the final countdown for the missile launch, there were more than 30. Every watch station was manned, and every man had an officer or senior enlisted man standing over his shoulder.

The men were crammed so tightly that it was difficult to move. One officer brushed up against a headset hanging on the end of a cabinet, and it clattered to the floor. The captain looked over sharply, but said nothing.

Kan was the only person moving around control, passing from station to station, offering a few quiet words of encouragement to his men and then moving on. He did it without bumping any shipmates or the equipment, like an actor on a stage who knows which board creaks and where the lighting is best.

"The adrenaline was high," Kan said later during an interview in his stateroom. "The hardest thing to do was to keep everybody calm, and following the game plan. They're very prepared and able to handle the job, but I sensed the adrenaline and wanted to take the time to talk to them, to calm them down."

□ □ □

The captain has said numerous times in the days leading up to the strike that the Providence trains as it fights, and fights as it trains. Thursday, as the crew moved toward actual combat, there was no deviation from the drills it ran once a week since it deployed.

As launch time arrived, there was one final check of all systems.

The navigator, Lt. Cmdr. Joseph A. Baldi, announced that the ship was ready.

The executive officer, Lt. Cmdr. Thad E. Nisbett, announced that the mission was ready.

The weapons officer, Lt. Eric Svensson, announced that the weapons were ready.

The captain gave the order to launch.

A few seconds later, there was a slight back-and-forth shudder, and a hiss of air as the first missile left a torpedo tube and the air used to pressurize the system returned to the ship.

On the video screen that shows the view from the periscope, which Baldi expertly trained right on the launch, there was a bright green glow as the rocket booster ignited underwater, then a spray of water. The screen filled with the brilliant white, orange and red of an expanding fireball, and then smoke obscured the view.

A blink later, the missile was lifting clear of the smoke and turning to fly away from the ship, looking like the sun at midday. Within five seconds, it was a pinpoint of light.

A few minutes later, the Providence fired a missile from one of its vertical launch tubes. Taking a route straight up, there was no hiss, and the ship rocked up and down slightly, rather than fore and aft.

On the screen, the missile lifted clear of the water on a pocket of expanding gas before the booster ignited, and it, too, was on its way.

□ □ □

The Providence had been prepared for a strike since arriving in the Red



TIM COOK / The Day

Crewmen aboard the submarine USS Providence stand by in the control room during the launch of a Tomahawk cruise missile against Iraq from its position in the Red Sea on Thursday. The Groton-based sub also fired missiles at Taliban targets in Afghanistan in October 2001.

Sea on Sunday but one detail had been put off until the last few hours — tearing 12 temporary bunks out of the torpedo room and storing them in the engine room.

Most submarines deploy with more crew than bunks, which means that crewmen have the choice of "hot racking" — using a bunk that someone else has just vacated — or sleeping in makeshift beds in the torpedo room.

In the submarine community, it's recognized that men have an easier time getting through six-month deployments far from home and family if they have their own bed and good meals, and most captains don't want to deny their crew either comfort.

When the call to battle stations came,

a line of men formed to pass everything hand-to-hand from the torpedo room, up the stairs to the second deck, through the crew's mess and past the aft bulkhead into the engine room, where the bunks were to be stored temporarily.

Mattresses, sea bags and the metal bed trays themselves were quickly moved out as the 15-man reload team arrived. The crew had done a drill to move the racks and accomplished it in 45 minutes. Thursday, under real life conditions, it beat that time.

There was also no time for "combat rack." When a ship has sufficient notice of a strike, the captain and executive officer try to carve a little time out of the schedule to allow the

men to grab a few extra hours of sleep.

Lt. j.g. Will Wiley, for instance, had worked a 24-hour day on Wednesday because of the vagaries of the watch schedule, some extra duty and some training that took place during what was supposed to have been his off time.

When the captain asked him at lunch Thursday if he had managed to sneak away to his bunk, Wiley replied with a grin that he had managed to squeak in five hours of sleep earlier and was ready for anything.

Before the day was out, he would put that to the test.

Despite the frenzy of activity and the lack of sleep, everyone was expected to follow the procedures they had learned under more orderly conditions.

In the wardroom, an emergency medical team gathered. Shoulberg, who leads the team in battle stations, eyed a mess specialist who had clearly just rolled out of bed and arrived without his emergency air breather, or EAB.

"Do you have an EAB?" Shoulberg asked.

The sailor shook his head no. "Were you in your rack?" Shoulberg asked.

A nod for yes. "Is there an EAB there?"

Another nod.

"Why don't you have it?" Shoulberg asked. When the crewman only shrugged and looked beleaguered, Shoulberg adopted a gentler tone.

"I know you're tired," he said, "but

you've got to think, if nothing else than for your own self-preservation."

□ □ □

In control, all discussions were carried out in a whisper; a constant murmur as dozens of people passed important information to each other, but still so quiet you could hear the ticking of a flow meter as the chief of the watch ordered some water brought into the trim tanks to adjust the depth of the submarine by a few feet.

The key players wore small plastic cards, on which were printed the procedures they were supposed to follow.

With the sun setting, Baldi was concerned about light from control leaking out through the periscope and alerting someone to the submarine's presence or affecting his ability to see ships on the surface. So he ordered, "Rig for low-level light."

A curtain was drawn around the periscope and overhead lighting was extinguished, leaving control eerily illuminated by the glow of computer screens.

Ens. Michael J. Vulpis, manning a communications station, reported that the launch authorization had been received.

Lt. j.g. Jeff Yackeren gave one final weather report: "Sea state one (calm); winds five knots; visibility unlimited; cloud cover 60 percent cumulus."

The captain looked like a man trying not to pace. He watched Baldi relieve Yackeren at the periscope, and his eyes scanned the room constantly, looking for anything not as it should be. One of his crewmen announced, "Five minutes to launch, tube one," and the captain received his final reports.

In battle stations, the most proficient personnel are in the most important seats, so things went smoothly, just as they would have in a drill, only this time the orders were not followed by silence, but by the rumble through the ship of missiles lifting off.

In minutes, the process was over. The captain offered a few words of praise to the men in control, then picked up the microphone for the public address system and repeated them for the full crew.

Later, the officers gathered in the wardroom 15 minutes before dinner for a discussion of the operation, and to

See SUBMARINE page A7

## 1000 Ways to Say "Thank You" to our friends in Connecticut



Current owners of any Saturn or GM vehicles whether leased, owned, or even originally purchased used, are now entitled to a \$1,000 Saturn/GM Loyalty Cash Allowance toward the purchase or lease of any New 2003 Saturn ION, VUE, or L-Series through March 31, 2003.

Saturn and GM want to thank everyone who helped make us the leading manufacturer in owner loyalty for three straight years.

Take advantage of the \$1,000 Saturn/GM Loyalty Cash Allowance, in addition to the generous APR and lease offers available, ends March 31, 2003.

**0% APR for 60-Months on all 2003 Saturn Vehicles.**  
GM Cardmembers can proudly redeem their GM Card Earnings thru the end of the month.

**SATURN of WARWICK**

1511 Bald Hill Rd., Rt. 2 • Warwick, RI

**Toll-Free: 1-888-941-3519**



**SATURN**

143271