

Providence fires more missiles

From A1
big grin on his face.
"Permission to spin up tubes?" Svensson asked.

"No way," the captain responded, an exaggerated look of disbelief on his face, after giving the clock on the wall a quick glance. "That's got to be a record."

Kan ordered "battle rats," a quick evening meal, in case more combat was ordered. His instincts proved accurate.

Most of the crew were just finishing their dinner of barbecue pork sandwiches when the call to battle stations went out again. The men scrambled to their posts to prepare for the next launch, this one much larger.

"This is going to be an all-nighter," Chief Electronics Technician Michael Simmons said as battle stations from the second strike broke up. He was right. The call for a third strike went out later in the night.

Up in the control center, preparing for the strike, the battle-stations crew was tracking ships that were a distance away. At night in the Red Sea, the light of a missile can be easily seen from afar.

Every one of the Providence's Tomahawk missiles departed without a hitch, and Kan lifted the battle-stations order for the second time that evening.

Sonar Technician 1st Class Daniel D. King Jr. stuck his head into the wardroom a little later and announced, "We hope you people enjoyed the in-flight movie, brought to you courtesy of the reload party."

As the captain was congratulating the crew for another impressive performance, a song by The Cult, "Wake Up Time For Freedom," played.

"Wake up time for freedom before the night prevails"



Friday night the Red Sea had a little more chop, so the periscope view was covered with water droplets, giving the brilliant light from the launches a starburst effect as the missiles raced across the video screen in the control room.

In the crew's dining area, 35 or more men crammed onto bench seats to watch, crowding a spot that normally accommodates only 24.

"There's more people onboard than there are jobs in battle stations, but everybody has to be up and ready to go," said Lt. J.G. Skevos "Steve" Psaras.

Assembling all the extra people in the mess, he said, serves a number of

purposes. They can be quickly accounted for in the event of a problem on the ship, and they can quickly form into a damage control team in the event of fire or flooding.

The gathering also allows the men to watch the wide-screen television showing the periscope view of the launches. It is a sight that captivates the crew. No one in the mess is distracted by cards or video games.

"This is what we came out here to do," said Psaras. "Nobody is going to miss it."

Each time a Tomahawk blasted from one of the torpedo tubes there was a sharp hiss of air and the ship shuddered. The video screen was filled with a brilliant green flash as the rocket booster ignited under the water, then there was a burst of white, yellow and red as it broke the surface.

"Get some, baby," shouted one sailor as a missile left.

"If you can read this, you are too close," joked another, reciting the words of a familiar bumper sticker.

"If you can read this, run!" rejoined another.

"That's your normal relief of tension right there," said Chief Hospital Corpsman Michael "Doc" Shoulberg.

"Impressive, very impressive," said Yeoman 1st Class Rick Magtira, who had never witnessed a launch before.

"Watching it go underwater before it takes off it probably the best part — the calm before the storm. Then you see all that spray, and it takes off."

Electronics Technician 2nd Class Peter J. Koester agreed.

"The torpedo tube launches really surprised me," Koester said. "They're really quite beautiful going up. Very ironic."

"You get that rush of adrenaline when you see them break the surface, and then kind of stand there transfixed as they fade off into the distance. I've seen videos, but it doesn't really capture what we saw and felt tonight. There's something different about being here live."

Koester has been to the Middle East before with the Providence. He served aboard in the late 1990s, including a 1998 deployment during a tense time in the Arabian Gulf.

Soon after the Providence returned home, several Navy ships struck Iraq in Operation Desert Fox, a missile attack ordered by President Clinton after learning of the Iraq government's attempt to assassinate his predecessor, President George H.W. Bush.

Koester was on shore duty at the Naval Submarine Support Facility in Groton when the Providence fired the opening shots of Operation Enduring Freedom against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001.

He said he was fairly confident he would not miss "the show" this time.

"Watching the news in the months leading up to this deployment," he said, "I had a feeling that something was going to happen this time."



Before the night's salvo was over, the crew got to see a vertically launched missile, which rocked the submarine slightly before it breached the surface and the motor lit up.

"Here comes 1,000 pounds of love," yelled a crewman.

The air was filled with shouts of excitement.

"Yee-ahhh."

"Who-oo."

The Providence crew also saw the contrails of a Tomahawk that was fired from a surface vessel.

"It was just like a Roman candle," said Lt. JG Jeff Yacker. "They were so far away when they shot, so I wasn't sure we would even see it."

Ironically, the men in the torpedo room, who get the missiles ready to fire, are the only people in the crew who never get to see the launch live because there's no video monitor down there. They could watch the videotape later, but usually they're so tired they'd rather sleep.

"I don't know what day this is anymore," Seaman Jalil-Ali Shakur said in the early hours of Saturday morning. When his shipmates reminded him, he calculated he had had one hour's sleep since Thursday morning.

"Every time we try to go do anything, they man battle stations again," Shakur said.

Torpedoman 3rd Class Anthony H.

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TIM COOK / The Day



■ **Top.** E4 Anthony Thompson prepares a Tomahawk cruise missile for a second round of strikes against Iraq in the torpedo room of the USS Providence in the Red Sea Friday.

■ **Left.** Lt. j.g. Josh Powere and Lt. j.g. John Killila, foreground, work the communications station in the control room of the USS Providence during the second round of Tomahawk strikes from the Red Sea Friday.

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