

# MILITARY MATTERS

## Table for 140, please: Sub sailors eat well on a budget

### Lobster tail and crab legs as sub departs Red Sea

By ROBERT A. HAMILTON  
Day Staff Writer

Aboard the USS Providence — To celebrate the submarine's departure from the Red Sea, and a successful combat mission, the crew dined on lobster tail and crab legs with melted butter.

That kind of special meal lifts the spirits of men who have been away from home for almost seven weeks and still have more than four months to go before they see their homes again.

But Chief Mess Specialist Chris Nailon has got to fit it into an authorized grocery budget of \$1,200 a day.

In other words, Nailon and his crew feed the Providence sailors three and sometimes four square meals a day, sometimes franks and beans, sometimes prime rib, for about what it would cost to treat everyone to a lunch of Big Macs, fries and a chocolate shake back home.

"There's some days I have low food costs, other days I have high food costs, but it all averages out," Nailon said. "Ideally, you want to be as close to zero as possible when you get home."

One way they can keep the cost down is to prepare most of the foods from scratch, including the ever-popular cin-

namon buns that Mess Specialist 1st Class G. Dwayne Davis delivered piping hot to the crew's mess one morning.

"There are some 'submarine staple' meals: sliders (hamburgers) on Friday, pizza on Saturdays," Davis said. "But I like baking. A lot of people on a submarine, they have a sweet tooth. So if I can make a pastry that puts a smile on someone's face, it makes me happy. It's our job to make people happy so they can go on watch and do their job."

Since World War II, submarines have had the reputation of serving the finest food in the fleet, perhaps in all the armed forces.

Every submarine skipper realizes that meals are key to crew morale, something to look forward to after long, hard work. If dinner stinks, spirits are likely to suffer.

The captain also recognizes that the mess specialists are critical to the mission in another way. They have to order carefully and maintain a meticulous running inventory.

"You don't want the books to say you have 100 pounds of chicken and you open the freezer and you only have 30 in there," Davis said. "You don't want to go to the captain and say, 'We need to pull in, because we don't have enough food to support the deployment.'"

And the menu can't be just about what the crew likes; it has to meet nutritional requirements.

Nailon, Davis and the supply officer, Lt. j.g. Carl Koch, develop a menu that

maps out breakfast, lunch, dinner and "midrats" — a shortening of "midnight rations," the term for the meal served at midnight for men coming off the evening watch.

Then nutritionists at the Naval Ambulatory Care Center in Groton review the menu before it is passed to the captain for final approval.

The Navy's basic daily food allowance is \$7.83 per person per day, but submarine chefs get an extra 55 cents (crews are small and they don't have the economies of scale of a surface ship that might be serving several hundred people), and another \$1.20 when the ship is deployed.

The crew has a database of recipes, though many have been adapted for Providence.

"I've used every Navy recipe in the box, so I know what works with the crew and what doesn't," Davis said. Sauces tend to be a bit bland, so he usually adds something to them. "Wicked chicken," spicy and batter dipped, has become a boat favorite.

He also uses butter instead of shortening in some pastry recipes, though he has to be careful on deployment.

"If I started using butter instead of shortening in every recipe, the chief would kill me, because we'd run out of butter pretty quick," Davis said.

The crew favors Mexican, Italian and just about any kind of steak. If they have one inexpensive meal of pasta and sauce, they can budget for prime rib the

following week.

"You don't want to be making money, or you're cheating the crew," Davis said. "If you're not using the full allowance, there's something wrong with the menu." ■■■

The mess crew on Providence started planning meals several months before the boat's Feb. 10 departure from Groton. The loading of flour, sugar and coffee (figure on seven pounds a day) began well before Christmas.

"We didn't know how much our schedule was going to move up, so we wanted to be ready to go by mid-December," Davis said.

That meant coordinating efforts with other departments on board.

"If they're loading weapons, we can't be loading stores at the same time," Davis said.

The Providence was told to pack enough food for 60 days, even though it was scheduled to replenish supplies in Crete a few weeks into its trip. Submariners know how quickly schedules can change.

On its last deployment in 2001, Providence had headed for home when the skipper got the call of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. He turned the boat around and headed back to the Persian Gulf.

"We might have had, at best, 20 days food on board," Davis recalled. "We were going to Greece to stock up before

we headed for home. Once we got the message about Sept. 11, we had to turn around, and me and the chief and the chop (Koch), we sat down to figure out what we were going to do."

A surface ship was able to supply the crew with enough food to last several weeks, and the Providence never ran out.

The stop for a re-supply in February was not without a hitch, either.

"It would have been real smooth. I think we could have gotten everything

done in two hours, if the cranes on the tender hadn't broken," Davis said. So the crew lined up and handed everything, bucket brigade, down into the storerooms.

But Davis said he wouldn't trade his job for any other in the fleet.

"I like the smaller community," he said. "On a carrier, you might not even get to meet everybody in a three- or four-year tour. Here, I know everybody on board."

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■ Chief Hospital Corpsman Michael "Doc" Shoulberg tests gas and oxygen levels in the access crawl space as part of routine checks on board the USS Providence while operating in the Red Sea Monday.



TIM COOK  
The Day

### DISPATCHES AT SEA

Editor's Note: Day reporter Robert Hamilton and photographer Tim Cook are aboard a Navy sub covering the war.

## On a sub, 'field day' has a special meaning

### Three hours spent scrubbing the head, blowing grime off a tangle of hydraulic lines

By ROBERT A. HAMILTON  
Day Staff Writer

Aboard the USS Providence — Electronics Technician 3rd Class Josh Finney normally works in the radio room and the computer network closet, areas kept fastidiously clean because dust can quickly damage the gear.

So on Friday's "field day," Finney was assigned to clean the crew's head behind the torpedo room, where there are two sinks, one shower and a toilet.

"I always draw this," Finney said as he took a break from scrubbing down the stainless steel. "They decided my space wasn't dirty enough to field day, so they found me one of the dirtiest spaces to clean instead."

"It's only one day a week, so it's no big deal. It cleans up quick enough, but there's enough stuff in here that it keeps me busy for three hours."

Field day is a tradition on Navy ships. It's usually on a Saturday on submarines, and always right before the ship pulls into port.

Most people crawl over the spaces with brooms of every size and shape, cleaning rags and sponges in buckets of soapy water, or compressed air lines to blow out dust from areas you can't reach.

"You know what I find amazing?" said Chief of the Boat Russ Neal. "You go to sea for 50, 60 days straight, and you still get dirt every time you clean. You'd think after that much time, the dust and the dirt would be gone."

He was walking around with a powerful flashlight peering into cavities. One of his other ships once hosted a visit by a submarine admiral who was invited to take a tour of the boat.

"We had the floors all cleaned and shined, and everything you could see was spotless," Neal recalled.

The admiral wanted to see under the drain pump, the valve station and the trash disposal units.

"Those are all the tough, tough areas to clean," Neal said.

In the auxiliary machinery room, Machinist Mate 1st Class Curtis R. Hormel ran a hose off the water heater to steam clean the deck plates. Machinist Mate 2nd Class Joshua D. Williams was on his hands and knees blowing the grime off a tangle of hydraulic valves and lines.

Lt. j.g. John Killila was poking his flashlight into every dark space he could find.

"You look for dirt, leaks or rust," Killila said. "Sir, isn't it time for you to do officer training?" Hormel asked.

"Nah, that's not for a half hour or so," Killila said. "I have time."

■■■

Sometimes, it seems like the sailors create work. Electronics Technician 1st Class Derek Brewer was using a foxtail broom to get at every corner of the stairs below him. But as quickly as he cleaned, dust was settling from the next deck up, where Electronics Technician 3rd Class Jason Rinaldo was blowing dust out of the ventilator filters.

"The worst job is when you have to clean some place where it's not really dirty, because then you spend all your time just trying to look busy but not really accomplishing anything," Brewer said. At least on the stairs, he was getting noticeable dirt.

In the torpedo room, Torpedoman 3rd Class Jonathan Rosario had System of a Down's "Toxicity" blaring over the Bose speakers overhead.

Normally, the only way he could listen to music in his workspace would be to wear headphones, because so many people use the torpedo racks for temporary berthing.

"It's the wakeup music for my chief," Rosario said with a grin. "It keeps him happy, makes him think better."

Chief Torpedoman Kent R. Hope, on his hands and

knees cleaning out a narrow channel in the deck plates with a toothbrush-sized wire brush, didn't look like the music was making him happy.

"Sometimes field day is two hours, sometimes it's three," said Torpedoman 3rd Class Anthony H. Thompson as he wiped down the weapons control panel with a damp rag. "We're hoping it's two today."

"It's three," Hope responded without looking up.

The chief noted that for three consecutive Saturdays the ship has missed field day, once because the crew had kept the ship so tidy, once because it was doing a transit of the Suez Canal, and the next week because it was conducting missile strikes against Iraq. Friday's field day was overdue.

"It's normally done weekly, come hell or high water," Hope said.

Storekeeper 1st Class Daniel D. King Sr. was taking advantage of the fact that everyone was out of their bunks to do an inventory in storage spaces in the berthing areas. Any other day, he would have to do it by flashlight, because there's always one shift of sailors in bed while the others work.

"It's been like six weeks since we got underway, and we've had just one day in port. So when the lights are on, we try to take advantage of it," King said. "I don't believe in racking people out just to do inventory. It's a submarine. You barely get any sleep as it is."

Not everyone takes part in field day. A lucky few win a raffle to get out of the duties.

This week, everyone stopped to listen as the navigator, Lt. Cmdr. Joseph A. Baldi, read off the names of the winners: Electronics Technician 2nd Class Marcus A. Koegler, Sonar Technician 2nd Class Stephen Casar and Electronics Technician 1st Class Randy Reid.

The three spent their few precious hours of inactivity Friday morning watching "Undercover Brother," and "Fast Times at Ridgemont High," in the chief's quarters.

"This will be the first one I've ever missed," Reid said. "I'm not going to feel guilty about it at all." b.hamilton@theday.com

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