



TIM COOK / The Day

■ The USS San Juan, being aided by a tug at left, arrives on station with the USS Providence during operations in the eastern Mediterranean Sea on Monday.

Mission accomplished, crew of San Juan heads for home

From A1

The enormity of the mission the San Juan could be handed at any moment began to hit the crew as the ship's return date came and passed and they were getting ready to enter the Red Sea.

"We had to keep telling the crew, 'Hey, you've practiced and practiced and you're ready to do this.' But when the time came, everybody lined up at their battle stations and things went off without a hitch."

One thing that helped to receive mission taskings and keep track of the 14 other submarines crowding the Red Sea was the advanced radio room. The USS Providence was one of the first submarines to receive the new gear, the "latest and greatest," said Electronics Technician 1st Class Michael D. Justice.

"I wonder, back during Desert Storm, how they did it," Justice said. Today the submarine force has chat rooms and a classified Internet system, as well as the use of a variety of radio frequencies.

"Back in Desert Storm, they only had voice communications," Justice said. "I don't know how they did it. But I think we kept fire control pretty happy."

"Yes, very happy," Fire Control Technician 1st Class Kory L. Hunter confirmed with a smile.

In fact, Takasuye said, one of the San Juan fire-control technicians used one of the secure communications networks to chat with another submarine that was having problems getting its missiles to fire.

"He recalled we had had a similar problem about a year ago and he was able to jump right in and help them fix it," Takasuye said. "He had them up and running in about an hour and a half."

Justice, who also serves as the boat's career counselor, has had 33 re-enlistments among the 125 or so enlisted people on board, thanks in large part to the tax-free status of the re-enlistment bonuses in a combat zone.

The bonuses range from \$2,000 to \$45,000, depending on the specialty and seniority of the service member. There was a total of \$938,000 in bonuses disbursed, Justice said, and the San Juan crew can expect to save about \$300,000 in taxes.

"This is the most re-enlistments I've seen by far," he said.

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Lt. Cmdr. Michael G. Badorf, the San Juan's executive officer, said that while the first half of the deployment included port visits to Turkey, Italy, Spain and Greece, once political tensions started to climb the crew had to go without liberty.

He said crew members did not complain about the extended deployment because they understood the importance of what submarines can do in a conflict. But now that the job is done, most of them are ready to make the overdue trip back home.

In addition, the crew has to prepare for a rigorous safety inspection between the Mediterranean Sea and Groton, and its TRE soon after it returns home.

"The hardest part of the deployment is this part. We've done all the stuff we were supposed to do, now we head for home, but we still have to do everything involved in safe submarine operations," Badorf said.

In the meantime, no one wants to take a chance on jinxing the trip home. Takasuye recalled that in January some members of the crew played a trick on the supply officer, who was newly married and anxious to return home. The anonymous crewmen created a phony message, ostensibly from up the chain of command, ordering the San Juan to take on enough supplies to stay in the Mediterranean another 90 days.

"The joke was on them, because that was 90 days ago now," Takasuye said. "I told them we don't joke like that again — no more extension jokes."

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Lost tank leaves four dead — and many questions

By MICHAEL WILSON
New York Times News Service

Nasiriyah, Iraq — The fog of war, or of fatigue? Or of a sandstorm?

An M1A1 Abrams tank with a crew of four U.S. Marines veered off a bridge west of Nasiriyah last week, crashing through a guardrail, sinking in the Euphrates River and

killing the crew of four. A detachment of Marines under the bridge witnessed the incident but didn't realize what had happened. Investigators did not go looking for the tank until sometime the next day.

The tank was part of a 1st Marine Division convoy heading north on Thursday night. Brig. Gen. John Kel-

ly, assistant commander of the 1st Marine Division, confirmed the accident and said the matter was still under investigation.

Kelly said that the cause might have been that the driver fell asleep, but that it is also possible that the driver might have been momentarily blinded by blowing sand.

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