

■ **Near right,** crew members of the USS Providence take a break from unloading supplies while their vessel is moored alongside the tender USS Emory S. Land in the Eastern Mediterranean Saturday.

■ **Far right,** Electronics Technician Craig Tuit looks over CD players in the tender's store.

■ **Below,** the crew forms a human chain to transfer supplies from the Land to the Providence.

TIM COOK / The Day



Reloading gives Providence crew a short break ashore

From A1

one. "Steel ships, iron men," noted another. "Who let the wolves out?" asked a third.

Technicians from Land were waiting to get across the gangplank that would soon be lowered to connect the two ships.

The submarine was low on ordnance after firing all its Tomahawk cruise missiles as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom last week, and has been out of fresh vegetables and fruits for several days.

Within minutes of the announcement on the Providence intercom system, "Ship is moored," the crew of the Land was pouring onto the ship, setting up the gear that would help reload missiles into the submarine's 12 vertical launch tubes and the torpedo room below decks.

Other sailors swung cables over to provide electrical, data, cable television and base phone service to the Providence, and connected potable water so the submarine does not have to worry about utilities for a few days, after a couple of weeks of combat.

"This is 'ops normal,'" said Lt. Eric D. Hansen of the Land crew. "These guys are so practiced at it, they can get this stuff done in no time at all."

Overhead, crane operators began readying pallets full of food and other supplies that will enable Providence to finish the last five months of its deployment.

Land is kind of a combination shopping mall and service station for submarines operating in the Mediterranean.

"We'll make the most of it while we're here," said the Providence captain, Cmdr. Jonathan H. Kan. "Every time you touch the pier you want to get as much done as you can to get the ship back to 4.0 condition, because you never know how long you'll be at sea once you go back out."

And the Providence crew is ready to make the best of the situation as well, though there will be limited liberty opportunities. For now they will be limited to "steel and concrete," the area immediately around where the land has docked.

Homeported in La Maddalena, Italy, Land has surged to a forward operating area, though the Navy has requested that its location not be disclosed.

The day had begun with reveille at 4 a.m., when most sailors were barely getting to bed. As the sun rose with a golden glow, Kan ordered "station maneuvering watch," which requires that every sailor be up and working.

The ship began to hum with activity, as sailors without specific duties for the dock-

ing gathered in the crew's mess to discuss what they would do that weekend.

The sailors laughed and joked as they prepared to go ashore, talking about the beers they will drink at the Argonaut, and calling home, getting laundry done, or just getting a bed that they don't have to share for a few days.

Sonar Technician 3rd Class Michael Curtis noted that during the submarine's 2001 deployment, there was a port call a few weeks into the trip and several that followed. This time, no one knows whether they will get a port call at all.

"I'm going to call my fiancé and I'm going to have a couple of beers at the club," said Seaman Michael R. McKenna. "Some people might be upset about not being able to go into town, but is it really that big of a deal? Not to me. It will be nice just to see the sun and breath fresh air."

Electronics Technician 3rd Class Nathan L. Fall said calling his wife was his top priority. They are newlyweds, married just seven months ago, and are expecting their first child in June.

"I'll make it home for the birth, they say," Fall said. "I certainly hope so."

"I'm going to play some pool, some poker, some spades and some dominos," said Mess Specialist 3rd Class Reginald L. Thornton. "I really wanted to get into town, but it'll be good just to get off the boat, stretch my legs and work out in a real gym."

"There are already five jobs completed, tested and reported back 'sat' (satisfactory)," Capt. David M. Volonino, commanding officer of the Land, said after the Providence had been alongside for less than eight hours. "Anything the sub crew needs, we provide them."

The Providence crew, meanwhile, bucked the tide of Land sailors streaming onto their ship, headed for the pier-side telephone booths to call home and to the convenience store to pick up snacks or shampoo.

"Every time we pull in, the first thing people want to do is call home, and then get mail. Those are the two big morale boosters," said Kan. "Last time we were here we loaded 300 pounds of mail, after just a month of deployment. Who knows how much we'll get this time."

"And the Land has been great about everything," Kan said. "They're not only doing all our high-priority items, they're doing way down into our low-priority items, everything down to latches on lockers. They are full-service."

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