

Advertising



The fancier the dinner, the more attractive the person paying for it. For fine dining, click here.



Click here for factory specials available in Western Washington.



Subscribe | Contact Us | Seattle PI

Jump to >> Weather | Traffic | Mariners | Seahawks | Sonics | Forum

Local

NEWS

Tuesday, March 18, 2003

Local

Chapel that embraces all creeds Simple cubicle provides place to pray at sea

By M.L. LYKE
SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

ABOARD THE USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN THE PERSIAN GULF -- Steam pipes crawl the walls of the room, painted an institutional beige. The fighter jets that screech off deck directly overhead continually rattle the screws loose in the ceiling, and deafen conversations about saints and sinners, prophets and pagans.

It is here, on folding metal chairs, that shipmates utter private secrets and confessions, gather in Wicca circles for meditation, study Bible verses, offer up devout prayers to Allah, work their rosary beads, celebrate the Jewish Sabbath.

This metal cubicle is the ship's chapel, a Heinz 57 worship center that undergoes more daily changes than a New York model. It's not fancy, but on a ship where full-immersion baptisms are conducted in scrubbed-out engine compartments, it works as a home base for Navy men and women navigating uncharted spiritual seas.



Grant M. Haller / P-I

Naveed Mohammad prays to Allah in the ship's chapel. Chief religious program specialist Rich Kleiner, who is Jewish, persuaded him to lead his service

"I come for the good vibes," says intelligence specialist Brad Riddle, a 21-year-old from Puyallup who joined the ship's 32-member Wicca group, one of the largest in the U.S. Navy.

The number of worshippers aboard has swelled since the Lincoln, steaming for its Everett home port, did a Jan. 1 turnaround toward the Persian Gulf.

"Our services have gone up at least 25 percent since the turnaround," says chief religious program specialist Rich Kleiner, who wears his "Mickey Mouse" mufflers to blot out the endless hammering of planes on deck.

- Transportation
- Education
- Elections
- Environment
- Legislature
- Joel Connelly
- Robert Jamieson
- Jon Hahn
- Visitors Guide
- Obituaries
- Neighborhoods
- Sports
- Nation/World
- Business
- A&E
- Lifestyle
- NW Outdoors
- Photos
- Special Reports

COMMENTARY

- Opinion
- Columnists
- Letters
- David Horsey
- Saturday Spin
- Forums

COFFEE BREAK

- Comics & Games
- Mike Mailway
- TV Listings

SHOPPING

- Archives
- NWclassifieds
 - Jobs
 - Autos
 - Real Estate
 - Rentals
 - Place an Ad
- NWsource
 - Coupons
 - Online Shop

- P-I ANYWHERE
- E-mail Newsletters
- News Alerts
- PDA

Enjoy delicious deals when you
DINING
ARE
SEA
 Top re offering dining
 March

AND
 Resta
 BE
 C A S
 earth

Lunch & thr
 \$12.50
 \$25 Pr

IN PAR
 The Se
 Su

TOOLS

- Print this
- Most pri

HEADLI

Cell Phones
Desktop

Those numbers could swell even more if air strikes begin, and casualties result.

Chapel the creeds



Decor inside the chapel -- open 24 hours for the dozens of daily services, study groups and individual meditations -- is simple. The altar is kept deliberately neutral, ready for symbolic transformation by Roman Catholic crucifix or Jewish ram's horn, incense or candle.

On Board ' Muhamma

Making sur isn't worse

Critics rip

He told his in verse

Rose's Hiv in smoke

Kalakala F bankrupt

Friends cal student's c

Legislature could ease taxes

Revised ta

White pow causes sca

Former Id: in terror in

Seattle dis layoffs

Behr agree million to : damage su

Northern I critical tur

Officer's sc accidental

Injured ma million in c

Day care c with bruisi

Man shot, indentified

Jail time fc senate sit -

Spelling be

Suspect in won't fight

Skiers kille avalanche

King Coun

Inside You



Every religion is accommodated. It's Navy policy.

"I make sure the Wiccans have as much time as the most fundamentalist Christians," says head chaplain Robert Marshall, one of five chaplains on board. "If you came up to me and said, 'I'm an atheist. I need some space for myself'-- I'd make sure you find some space in the chapel."

OUR AFFILIATES



Marshall, from Olalla, Wash., calls the all-purpose multicultural chapel a "microcosm of Seattle."

At any given moment of the day, a peek through the room's miniature porthole may reveal a Catholic Mass, a Hebrew reading class, a Protestant Communion, a Latter-day Saints worship session, or choir practice for the Upper Room Fellowship choir.

The last is a Gospel group that performs Sundays in the ship's foc'sle, next to behemoth 308,000-pound anchor chains that look as if they belong in a medieval torture chamber for giants.

The choir inevitably sets the congregation clapping, swaying and singing the praises of the Lord, the celebrants' voices vibrating over the continual rumble of the ship's engines. Layman preacher Ivan Phillips, a St. Louis petty officer in radio central, exhorts worshippers to feel the joy and mortify the flesh.

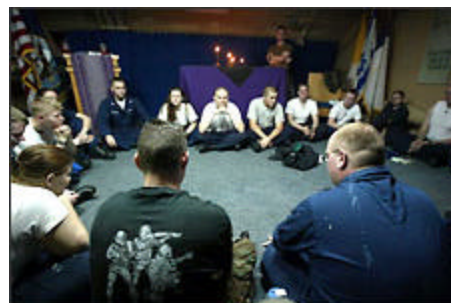
"That flesh is no good. That flesh is not holy. Amen.

"That flesh is a terrible thing. It's forbidding you from doing all the things God has for you. Amen.

"Say, kill that flesh off!

"Kill that flesh off! Amen!"

The ambiance of the chapel is make-do churchy. Large light boxes with phony stained-glass windows hang from the walls. A U.S. flag stands in one corner, next to a peace scroll with olive branch and dove. Inside a metal closet, in a nod to acceptance that escapes the outer



world, Muslim prayer rugs and copies of the Quran are stored opposite Jewish prayer shawls, menorahs, the Torah.



Grant M. Haller / P-I

Sailors form a Wiccan circle in the Abraham Lincoln's chapel. The leader, with his chin on his hands, is 23-year-old Patrick Dranchak.

It was a Jew, Kleiner, who persuaded a Muslim, Naveed Muhammad, to lead his own worship service in the chapel. Muhammad, a 20-year-old electrician's fireman born in Pakistan, says he was startled at the invitation.

"I said, 'Wait a minute! Aren't you Jewish?' I have to admit, I was a bit prejudiced."

The Detroit seaman, one of three Muslims attending the services, says: "All my life, I have been taught that the Jewish hate the Muslims. Now here's a chief who wants to help me out."

Muhammad's leading petty officer also came to his aid. When he saw the slight young man performing calls to prayer in the shop, he cut out one of the lockers, smoothed it with a sander, painted it and told Muhammad: "OK, that's your space. No one will bother you."

Muhammad's toughest challenge was not answering shipmates' questions about Islam, but deciding how to turn his prayer rug toward Mecca. The ship is continually shifting directions.

"I asked an imam in Detroit about what I should do," says Muhammad. "He said not to worry. He said that all Allah looks for is that you are trying -- that he's not picky like us humans."

Both Muhammad and Kleiner, a reservist who's a social case worker in Colorado, find shipmates more tolerant of different religions than civilians in the outside world.

"Here, nobody is against you -- even though we're on the verge of war. I haven't been harassed by anyone," says Muhammad.

Surprisingly, it is the Wiccans, not the Muslims, who've taken the most flak.

Sanna Masanz, a 26-year-old from Louisiana who works in ship's supply, is the lay leader of the Wiccan group. She says some religious groups have felt a need to "cleanse" the room after they meet.

"They say, 'Make sure you don't leave anything bad' -- like we're using skeleton bones and ashes and frog warts to cast spells in here.

"I have to explain to people that Wicca is not what you see in movies, or read in books."

Patrick Dranchak, a 23-year-old reactor mechanic with a beatific smile, says he made a small clay energy gremlin and set it on a pipe in his reactor shop. "One of the Bible thumpers said, 'You can't do that' and squished it and broke it."

The Wiccans meet in the chapel on Saturday nights, after "checking their negative energy in at the door." They move the metal chairs to make a circle on the floor. On the altar, one lights sticks of incense and four candles, to represent earth, air, fire and water. The stereo plays a track mixing sounds of classical strings with the howls of wolves.

The practitioners bring their symbols and tools. There are books ("The Complete Book of Witchcraft," "Living Wicca"), tarot cards, stones (crystals and hematite, tiger's eye and malachite), necklaces with ancient Celtic knots and pentacles.

As Dranchak begins a guided meditation, eyes close on the faces of 20 young shipmates.

With each deep, slow breath, they suck in the ship's peculiar air of human funk and kerosene.

"Let everything slip away, flow away," says the leader.

"Deep down, focus a point of energy in yourself. Slowly let it grow, push it outward.

"Let it fill your entire body, fill your skin, cover your skin, your entire body."

The chapel suddenly seems quiet, despite the thunder of the jets overhead.

Up there, the world may be on the verge of war.

Down here, in this chapel, for a moment, there is inner peace.

P-I reporter M.L. Lyke can be reached at abelincoln@seattlepi.com

 [Printer-friendly version](#)

 [E-mail this story](#)

 [Get e-mail news updates](#)

 [Subscribe to the P-I](#)

[Back to top](#)

Advertising

SeattleFSBO.com



Buy or Sell Homes
Commission FREE!

Directions to the largest number of **NEW HOMES**

[Home](#) | [Site Map](#) | [About the P-I](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [P-I Jobs](#) | [Home Delivery](#)

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

101 Elliott Ave. W.
Seattle, WA 98119
(206) 448-8000

Home Delivery: (206) 464-2121 or (800) 542-0820

Send comments to newmedia@seattlepi.com

©1996-2003 Seattle Post-Intelligencer

[Terms of Service/Privacy Policy](#)