In 2003, NBC's Brian Williams is onboard the USS Memphis, a nuclear submarine, for an at-sea missile launch drill. The nuclear sub uses sonar to "see" underwater, and can intercept telephone conversations 25 miles away on land.
Transcript

On Board the U.S.S. Memphis: Nuclear Subs Run Silent, Run Deep

TOM BROKAW, anchor:
For some time now, we have been watching the buildup of American forces in the Persian Gulf: mechanized infantry divisions, Marine divisions, fighter jet squadrons, Patriot missile batteries, aircraft carriers. But one of America's most sophisticated weapons could be on duty in the Persian Gulf and never seen, the nuclear sub. Run silent, run deep. NBC's Brian Williams tonight begins a two-part exclusive report on the USS Memphis, a lethal weapon and a great collector of intelligence.

OFFSCREEN VOICE #1: (Unintelligible)...battle station.

BRIAN WILLIAMS reporting:
On board the USS Memphis in the North Atlantic, the ship is rising at such a steep angle that it forces all of us into the forward-leaning stance of a ski jumper. Then, a sudden and dramatic change in depth.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #1: The ship is proceeding deep to 691 feet with a 25-degree down angle.

WILLIAMS: Now diving at such a severe angle, it takes everything we have not to lose our footing out from under us. The Memphis is a $2 billion ship, a Los Angeles-class nuclear submarine, on a cruise missile firing drill at sea under the command of Captain Rick Breckenridge.

Captain RICK BRECKENRIDGE: In approximately six minutes, I intend to go to firing point procedures for missile launch. Carry on.

WILLIAMS: The Memphis and the 140 sailors on board are all at their happiest when they are at depth and at speed.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #2: Raise bearing.

WILLIAMS: There's zero visibility in these waters. The ship may be flying blind, but it can hear for miles around. The men in the sonar room are the keepers of the secrets. They can identify everything in the water.

Mr. JOE GREENE (Sonar Technician): Each ship that's out in the water has a specific signature, and that signature will print up on our display.

WILLIAMS: You can tell a fishing boat from an aircraft carrier from a trawler from a sub.

Mr. GREENE: Just like that, sir.

WILLIAMS: In order to see what's around it, in order to communicate, to send and receive messages, the Memphis has to break the surface of the water. That's when the Memphis becomes vulnerable.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #3: If we're off the coast of a bad-guy country and they've got surface search radars scanning the surface, that could give away our position.

WILLIAMS: You're done.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #3: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: With its cruise missiles and torpedoes, the Memphis has the firepower to level several major cities, blow any threatening vessel out of the water.

OFFSCREEN VOICE #2: Got it.

WILLIAMS: But in the post-9/11 world, there's another reason it's so valuable. It's a floating intelligence-gathering platform. It is capable of intercepting phone conversations up to 25 miles away on land. It is 60
feet longer than a football field, and yet, at depth, it is virtually undetectable as long as it wants to be.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #4: Weapon ready.

WILLIAMS: When the Memphis belches a torpedo, the pressure of the escaping air is felt throughout the ship.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #5: Commence launch. Shoot tube three.

WILLIAMS: Veteran submariners would come on board this vessel and notice something instantly that would be lost on the rest of us, and that is that these torpedo racks are largely empty. That's because most of the Navy's battle-ready torpedoes are headed for probable battle halfway around the world. When it's this submarine's turn, these racks will be full.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #6: Off the deck, prepare to surface.

WILLIAMS: The Memphis may get her turn soon. There's a six-month deployment in her near future, and all those on board just assume they are heading to the very front lines.

OFFSCREEN VOICE #3: Hull bridge, right 15 degree rudder, steady course one, two, three.

WILLIAMS: Brian Williams, NBC News, on board the USS Memphis.