

Stories from the Crew

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From Bob Ianucci, LT/Navigator 68-70:

In 1969, SIRAGO was tapped to make a short notice Mediterranean deployment to fill in for another squadron ship that had an engineering problem. Cdr. Bob Buzzard was CO, I was Nav/Ops and Chief Charlie Veir was our lead Quartermaster. We had a problem. The tender calibration shop said one of our two ancient Bendix Aviation Corp. Marine Sextants was beyond hope for calibration. The one remaining unit had been dropped on the bridge by a Summer Cruise Midshipman doing his day's work in navigation and it had arrived in the conning tower in a shower of pieces and parts. LORAN C would not hack it in the MED (ENCS (COB) Hess told me it would never work because it didn't have an oil drip pan.)

There were no sextants available in the Navy Supply System at that time. I had read about the super accurate German-made, Plath Marine Sextant, but when we tried to buy one we ran into a Congressional ruling that said we had to “buy American.” The updated U.S. Navy version of the German Plath was nearing acceptance, but would not enter the system for months after we deployed.

Fortunately, I had a very good friend who was Supply Officer on a SSBN and he owed me a big one for previous help obtaining uniforms for Admiral Rickover. His “boomer” was in Newport News Shipyard for an extended overhaul and modification. While he could not speed up delivery of the new Navy sextant, he was able to arrange a loan of his boat's PLATH sextant for the deployment.

It was a wonder of modern, pre-GPS satellite, celestial navigation; a truly fine instrument. Although it had been aboard the boomer since commissioning it had never been used or even taken out of its original plastic-sealed wrapping. That sextant was a navigation prize and we truly hated parting with it when we returned from the MED.

The rest of the story: We had been back from the MED for less than a month when a package appeared on my bunk. I was excited to see that our long-awaited, modern Navy sextant had arrived-better late than never. Amid a lot of talk, looking and passing around, Chief Veir and I decided that it had all the features of the German Plath that we had come to respect and we looked forward to breaking in our new toy. The Supply System had come through for us. The next day, another package appeared on my bunk. A second Navy sextant! Joy of joys, now we had one plus a backup. But we had only ordered one..... The paperwork was identical to the first sextant, so I shrugged my shoulders and figured it was a gift from the stars. I started to get concerned when a third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh sextant arrived on every successive day. (Running out of storage space, bunk full.) We finally boxed up sextants three through seven and carried them over to NSC Norfolk and

convinced them there had been some sort of mistake. We/they never did figure out what happened, but in the end number seven was the last we received and SIRAGO wound up with two of the first modern Navy sextants that came off the production line.

From Hank Haynes, ETR3 64-65:

I believe it was the winter of 1964 when I first came on board Sirago. I was an ETRSN just out of sub school. The boat was in dry-dock in Portsmouth.

I qualified on Sirago when LtCmdr Gilchrist was the Skipper. Sirago was the only boat I served on.

I remember few people....a cook named Sewell (?), Pappy Goff, the COB was Watson who instructed me it was traditional to buy the COB a box of Dutch Master Panatellas when I qualified (to which I did just that).

Trying to throw a monkey fist to the pier in Bermuda looking into a 60 MPH head wind. I gave the Skipper my "NY look" when he told me to " put it over". I was a pretty good ballplayer but Roger Clemmens couldn't have put that over.

Cleaning whale blubber from the superstructure with a boat hook in choppy seas before entering port. (We bumped the whale at 200 feet and shook up everyone). I'm sure the whale felt it too.

Watching Pappy Goff bump the air manifold operator and blow safety when the bow planes stuck in full dive position during a hand dive at flank speed. Capt. Gilchrist entered Control room just as Pappy did this and then Pappy asked the Skipper for "permission to blow the sanitary tank ?" He was one cool headed sailor. It's funny now but we were all scared to death at the time. I'm sure Pappy saved us all.

I spent 10-12 hours tied into the sail while coming through the Straits of Gibraltar. Air was coming into the boat from the raised snorkel mast and the main hatch was dogged in the Conn. Waves were getting us wet, rock and roll at its utmost (I think someone below actually broke an arm). Contacts everywhere (maybe hundreds) , little or no control and a memory that I'll take to my grave. We got a ration of brandy when we were finally relieved and a day off.

I'm sorry I have so few names to remember, but I was "really there" and would love to know if anyone else remembers my stories or me.