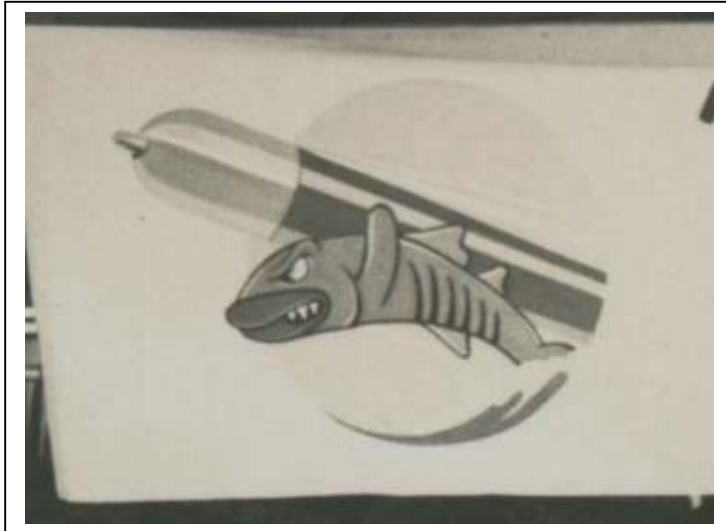


# Sirago - The Early Years

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As our 60<sup>th</sup> commissioning anniversary approaches (August 13, 2005), a subject has come up about the “true logo” of the USS Sirago (SS485). The question of where the name Sirago came from has emerged. Also, folks have gotten a bit confused as to how we adopted the Sea Horse motif and when that actually happened.



The logo shown on the left above is from the banner that hung behind the photo of the commissioning crew, so we can definitely take it that this was the “original” logo. The one to the right is our current logo and has been for some time, but you can see that it is of a seahorse with a trident and Trojan’s helmet, using the Sirago (Portsmouth step-sail design) as a Trojan’s shield. The “step-sail” design clearly indicates this as coming from the 1949-1962 period when Sirago had a step-sail design, so this precludes this being a “late period” design.

The “original logo” (left) shows a FISH with teeth and stripes. The commissioning program quotes as follows: **“The SIRAGO is member of the family Gobiidae, also called Gobies, which are carnivorous fishes, mostly of small size.”** It goes on to also tell about the bands on its side and that the fish lives in the fresh waters of the West Indies (i.e., Caribbean area). According to other sources, however, the name is not Sirago, but rather Sirajo. On searching the Internet for SIRAJO we found the same description of this fish of the Gobie family. This begs the question of how the name got changed from SIRAJO to SIRAGO.

In an article written by CAPT. William F. Calkins, USNR over 10 years ago, he describes the process he himself used to name submarines in the 1940s. Capt. Calkins states: **“Submarines are named for fish, or ‘denizens of the deep’. At the peak of the shipbuilding program, the navy had about 500 submarines afloat, a-building, or a-planning, and that’s a lot of fish. I can testify. There are nowhere near as many fish as you may think there are. Most particularly, since ichthyologists seem to prefer Latin names for fish, there are even fewer fish names that the average citizen-sailor can (a) pronounce, (b) spell, or (c) even recognize as belonging to a fish. The reasonable names like TROUT, BASS, SALMON, and SHARK were used up long before I appeared. I was reduced to scrabbling around for names like SPINAX, IREX, MERO, and SIRAGO. You never meet any of these on a shore side restaurant menu.”** He goes on to describe that there was some “fudging” of names, using of Spanish or Italian names, and other tricks to generate the number of fish names that they needed.

OK—so now we know that the Sirago was named by Capt. Calkins and he probably just “fudged” the spelling or used an alternative spelling for the fish. This still doesn’t answer the question of where the Trojan-helmeted Sea Horse came from.

We did a fair amount of e-mail research on this subject and had the following comments submitted:

**Bruce Anderson (51-53):** My info says that a Sirago is a small fresh-water tropical fish. I do not know what the original patch was, or who the designers were, but I have worn the Sirago patch (seahorse wearing a helmet and carrying a trident) on my WWII vest for many, many years.

**Ed McDevitt (52-55):** The patch with seahorse was available in 1953. I have one and it shows the boat with the Portsmouth sail.

**Buddy Shumake (52-54):** I believe Maynard Kessler designed the Sirago patch with Seahorse. I was in the Engine Room with him. He also did all the cartoons in the Submarine Squadron 6 book for Sirago. He was one of the first guys I remember who had contact lenses. Many times he would be cleaning them and someone would open a hatch and away they went. We had to find them. He had many tattoos.

**“Rawhide” Rainey (52-54):** I happen to know that the Sirago patch was designed by a great shipmate, EN1 Kessler, a talented artist, who was a WWII submariner with at least seven War Patrols. He entertained us with his drawings the whole time I was on the Sirago. This guy was tattooed all over, with twin screws on each cheek of his butt. I have never heard of him since.

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So there you have it, folks. We have now pegged down the date as the 1953-1954 timeframe, with Maynard Kessler (EN1) being the chief suspect. Since Maynard has not yet been accounted for, we cannot know for sure, but this is the best information we have so far. Also note that a Squadron 6 book was mentioned. That “book” was called “Periscope Views” and featured each boat in the Squadron with photos of the crew, writeups on the CO, XO, COB, ship logos, candid shots, and so on. So, how did Maynard and others decide on the Motif of the Sea Horse, the Trident, the Trojan war-gear, and so on?

We have learned that, during the design of Periscope Views, there were a number of boats with either NO official logo or ones that looked almost identical to others. It is important to remember that once Sirago had the “Portsmouth Sail” (1948-1949 Guppy Conversion) she was transferred to Squadron 6 in NORVA (from Squadron 8 in NLON). From early 1946 and through 1948 (until the conversion), she was attached to Squadron 8 and primarily provided services for the submarine school. But after the conversion and her arrival at Norfolk, she became the “workhorse” of the Squadron. She was heavily involved in ASW work, hunter–killer operations, NATO exercises, and overseas deployments. The vast fleet of submarines was pared down to just top-of-the-line Guppy Girls, and they were expected to work long and hard. Not to discount any of the hard work that the earlier crews had done up north, but there seemed to be a need to redefine the Sirago in her new “Guppy” role with the fleet.

So the “workhorse” idea became a Sea Horse. And according to Greek Mythology, Poseidon (same as Roman Neptune) is associated with the creation of the horse. Here is where we get the connection of the Trident (used by Poseidon) and the Seahorse. Of course, all these Greek stories circle around the Trojan wars. The Trojans were fierce warriors and the story was told that ONE Trojan soldier could beat a whole army of non-Trojans single-handedly because of his extreme dedication and training. It seems clear that our own Sirago had redefined herself as a “workhorse,” a “strong warrior,” and, in general, fearless. Taking these ideas down, it seems that Maynard created the design that we now hold as the official Sirago Logo.

There are a number of Sirago plank owners who are somewhat disappointed and confused that the original logo was changed to a seahorse, and who have difficulty understanding why the crew would allow the boat to abandon it’s “original logo.” They take umbrage at putting down the small “fresh-water” fish.

**Gene Racine: (Plank Owner 45-46):** If you will note, in all the data we’ve uncovered, that the LARVAE of the SIRAJ0 started in the marine [salt water] and fought its way to the highest river with the determination of a true champion. You know that we PLANKIES have no objection to wearing the patch, but we remember the original Sirago logo and to us it reflects that tough little fish.