

Sirago Newsletter



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Conning Tower Watches!

Stories from our crew

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Ed Vallecorse (SN, 55-58)

Back in '56 or '57, LCDR Shannon D. Cramer was the CO. He was a real big man (maybe it was because he just looked big being the captain), about 6 feet 5 or so. As anyone who has been in the conning tower during Battle Stations knows, it is a really crowded place. On this one cruise, we were making a run on an aircraft carrier down in the Caribbean and the captain had the CONN. Lt. Kilmer, a tall, thin, Ichabod Crane-looking type was relaying the bearings and ranges to the TDC operator that the captain was calling as we made our run. Kilmer had these long, size-12 shoes that he liked to push over the lip of the battle scope so that his instep and heel were up to the edge and the rest of his foot hung over the well. When the scope was up, there was a large space between the bottom of the scope and the well that sometimes things got accidentally dropped into.

On this particular day, I had the duty of the hydraulic

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Now & Then! My Take...

Reminiscences of the reunion – Joe Roche

I remember my very first day and the very last day aboard Sirago. Two very significant days—who I met, what transpired, and what happened after. All these memories came flooding back to me as I drove down through the DelMarVa Peninsula on my way to Virginia Beach and my first Sirago Reunion. Having missed the two previous ones because of a major hurricane and work, I was determined not to let anything else deter me from attending our 2003 reunion.

My very first day reporting aboard I met Doc Lay, and in the midst of a hurricane I met the then-LTJG Mike Leeds, who was on the bridge, huddled behind the bubble trying to stay out of the force of the wind, but could do nothing about the chest-high green water filling the bridge as Sirago's bow plowed under massive waves. The previous lookout, who I had relieved, pointed in some vague direction toward two destroyers off our port bow. I watched wide-eyed as water filled the bridge each time the bow went under a wave, I wondered, "What the hell am I doing here?" I could be safe and sound back on the aircraft carrier I was so desperate to leave not so many months before.

My last day on Sirago was as anti-climatic as my first day was traumatic, in the sense that few people were aboard that morning, probably because we were just recently back from our Med cruise and the brown baggers were home enjoying their families for the first time in three or four months. I packed my gear, walked up to the yeoman's shack, and got my orders from McDonald, our yeoman. I walked back through the enginerooms for the last time. Or so I thought. I was filled with sadness and anticipation. It was disquietingly empty of the sounds of work, talking, kidding around, and the general chop breaking that I had gotten so used to, that goes along with young men who are used to getting filthy dirty, trying to keep the engines in working order and ready for sea.

As I climbed the after engine-room hatch and reached topside, I realized that this part of my life was over and a new one was to begin. LT Wayne Moyer was giving an orientation to a group of what I guessed to be SEALS who were coming on board for some sort of operation. I shook hands with Mr. Moyer. He wished me well and I left Sirago after serving her for almost

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lever operator that raised and lowered the scopes. Captain Cramer had this habit of signaling for "up scope" by raising his thumb and quietly commanding "up scope." When he was finished with his observation, he would simply slap the scope handles together and that was the signal to lower the scope. As we made our runs, more often than not I could not even see the captain because of all of the people up there. Anyway, on this one run I thought I had heard the handles slap together and I pulled the lever that lowered the scope. As the scope came down, the splash pan raked across the captain's nose and took a bit of skin with it. As it continued down, it took Kilmer's foot and forced it down a ways into the well. Of course, there was a lot of shouting taking place by this time. When the shouting was over, Cramer very slowly and "softly said, "Vallecorse, take over the helm," which I did. He then, in the same voice, commanded, "Go to manual reversion." That was followed by, "Left full rudder." After about 52 turns of the wheel I reported, "The rudder is left full. Pant, pant." That was immediately followed by the command, "Right full rudder." By the time the rudder was right full I could barely stand up anymore. (I was in pretty lousy shape. I had gone from 145 pounds to 195 in about 6 months aboard. It was no wonder that my nickname was Toad. I don't eat that way anymore and get a lot more exercise.) By the time "rudder amidships" was attained, I had to have a relief as I was shaking so badly.

Fortunately, neither the Captain or Lt. Kilmer were seriously injured and I did not have a heart attack, but I never handled the scopes again during Battle Stations.

Harry Yockey (LT. 59-62)

One night (either in 1961 or 1962) I had the Conning Officer midnight watch while we were in ASW Task Group ALPHA. Our role was to be the "mechanical rabbit" for P3s and S2Fs to conduct their ASW training sonobuoy searches. About halfway through the watch, we heard a lot of Practice Depth Charge (PDC) explosions that were very distant. We remarked that COBBLER must be getting a good working-over because the PDCs were much too far distant to be "attacking" SIRAGO. About an hour later, we received orders to surface and terminate the exercises.

The next morning we were ordered to join a search line with the destroyers to look for any sign of one of the S2Fs, which had gone down earlier. Later that morning, SIRAGO's well-trained lookouts found some debris in the water and we maneuvered alongside. Soon our swimmer came back to the boat with an aviator's crash helmet and they passed it up to the bridge. I received the helmet from one of the men on deck and was stunned to see the name "LT Glenn Goode" inside the helmet.

Now for the rest of the story. Ironically, several months earlier, LT Goode had ridden SIRAGO as part of the cross-pollination training program and I was his host. Then, several months later, I had flown with him in the copilot's seat of his S2F off the deck of the carrier! The multiple PDC explosions we heard during the mid-watch were the PDCs from LT Goode's plane as they reached their set detonation depths after his plane crashed.

I did not fly again for over four years!
Warmest regards and God Bless,
Harry

Editors note

I remember the incident very well. We almost lost our "swimmer" due to the large swells and how quickly they drove him away from Sirago!

Mike Young (SN, 65-68)

"I was young. I was dumb. I'm sorry. I'll never do it again!" Usually I reserve these excusatory remarks for my matrimonial survival, but in this case I feel I must apologize to my shipmates for putting their lives in peril.

The morning was young, the moon was yellow, and the seas were silvery and flat. I'd just relieved Koller at the helm on the first rotation on mid-watch and he assumed my lookout position in the shears. The ensign on watch that morning had been nodding off, no doubt from sleep deprivation and plain ole boredom. Being a little bored myself, I came up with an idea that I could do a 360 and the OOD would be none the wiser. Ken mildly protested my "great idea," but nonetheless agreed to be on the lookout for any unforeseen tragedy. I gave it about twenty minutes to allow the switch to settle down and set my plan into motion. After a quick scan of the radar screen, I eased the rudder to starboard and set about a ten-degree error in course. Not a peep from the 7MC. Emboldened, I continued the circle until I reached about 181 relative and the jig was up! I hadn't thought about our wake! That woke the OOD and the 7MC howled, "What are you steering?" I replied, "A big, black submarine, sir?"

Robert Holt (EN1, 69-72)

Hi Guys. The only time I had in the barrel—being a snipe and all—was a couple of u/i watches for quals. I do however remember a funny (?) thing I can relate to you. One of the stewards came up to the conn and asked to go to the bridge. We got him permission. He took a huge mouthful of coffee and went up. In a very short moment he was back, without his cup. The watch asked him where his cup was and he said no, that was for the Captain. We looked at each other funny and asked why he had drunk from the CO's cup. He said, "CO like full cup of coffee. I hold it so as not to spill on the way to bridge...then put it back before I hand it to him." Yum. ♦

three years. I walked down Pier 22, heading for Separations without looking back.

In between Day One and the Last Day, there were many other days of grinding work, days of loafing around, days full of laughter, fun, lots of chop breaking, bitching, and field days. And of course, the infamous "titivate ship!!" Now I don't know about anyone else, but I did not know what titivate ship meant then, but according to Dictionary.com it means to tidy; spruce up; to make decorative additions. HAH! I thought it was a word that Doc Lay made up out of his Machiavellian mind to get us out of our filthy bunks, to clean the boat, so he could go through the boat spraying some sort of disinfectant around, in, and above our bunks.

This is the kind of stuff that went through my mind during that drive that day.

As I met many of the men I had served with over forty years ago, I recognized most of them. At least I remembered their faces. It was a wonderful reunion—well planned, well run, with lots of activities. If you didn't have fun, it was your own fault. It was a blast to see some of the engine-room gang I worked with. Tittman was the first throttleman I ever oiled for. Craig (who I later worked for) Yokum! He and I became inseparable as shipmates and friends, and he would eventually go home with me to New York and spend weekends with my family. Guys who were good guys then and who are still good guys today, like a couple of knuckle-draggers from the forward torpedo room, McClintock and McGuire. The maneuvering gang that showed up. Schmitt, Abbruzzese, Hughs and Bryant. Bruce Boughton, who went LDO as did Abbruzzese.

Swim calls; the beach party in Karachi, Pakistan; skiing in the Italian Alps. The only two guys who could ski were Geoghegan and McEniry. The rest of us stayed on the beginner's slope, slipping, sliding, falling, and laughing, crawling over to where we had opened bottles of Cognac stashed along the slope. So no matter where we were, we were within a short crawl to a bottle. Pappy Goff, who had more guts for an older guy than I had, who was almost half his age. He was fearless flying down that slope.

Joe Hoffman, who looks almost as young as he did when he first reported aboard. And I remember that night well! How does he do that? The story telling of Frank Weltner. The passion of Harry Yockey.

I steered my car over the Bay Tunnel Bridge, which was not completed in February of 1964 when I was discharged. Here I am, going over it for the first time, returning home from an event I never thought would happen. It was the Internet that allowed this to happen, along with a group of dedicated men willing to put in the long hours necessary to find us all. Put it all together. Put out a newsletter. Do all the things that make the Sirago Association a viable organization.

Some of our shipmates who are on Eternal Patrol were in my thoughts too. Mike Tatro and 'Pappy' Goff, who I worked with, come to mind, as do Jack Bonner and our CO Jim Wilson.

Our service on submarines, whether a brief one enlistment or a career, molded us, and we are who we are today because of it. For myself, a kid who was walking a thin line between legal and illegal, submarine service gave me a much-needed purpose to my life. It gave me a sense of responsibility that was so lacking before Sirago, but is the linchpin of who I am today.

I think we all owe a debt of gratitude to the Submarine Force we served. In turn, the Submarine Force we served owes us a debt of gratitude for serving her so well. ♦

Joe Roche DS6164



*Editor Joe Roche w/ Arm around sweethearts..
THEN and NOW....*



SIRAGO TRIVIA

Mike Bickel

Our next reunion will celebrate the 60th anniversary of our commissioning on August 13, 1945. But, this date also has an interesting piece of trivia associated with it. Since World War II was officially over on August 15, 1945 Sirago is the "baby" of the WWII boats to be commissioned. In fact, she and only one other Destroyer Tender were commissioned on August 13, 1945. There were NO Navy combatant vessels commissioned on August 14th, so this means that Sirago was, most probably, the very last combatant vessel to be commissioned during WWII, in addition to being the last submarine.

So...why is this important? It's important because Sirago is, therefore, a member of the WWII Submarine Fleet and is listed on many sites as such. Many organizations focus on WWII Boats and keep lists of those boats' editors, and seek memorabilia from such boats such as patches, bells, etc. So...in addition to the distinction that you have of being a "smoke boat sailor," you are also a crewmember of "The Last of the World War II Submarines." ♦

DUTY SECTION NEWS

Recently Deceased Sirago Crewmembers:

Harvey W. Mallins (F1/c, 45-46; died 2/26/02)

Raymond Marcantonio (ET2, 50-51; died Spring 03)

Edward C. Medves (SA, 49-50; died 4/17/03)

-----*Sailor, rest your oar*

WEBSITE NEWS

As everyone should know (by now), our Web site is www.sirago.com and that should be pretty easy to remember. IF you have an e-mail address and haven't told us, please e-mail Joe Roche (JFR485@OPTONLINE.NET). If you have photos of the old days that are NOT on our Web site, please contact Mike Bickel (RMBICKEL@STUPP.COM) so that we can share these with others. You can arrange to mail them to Mike or, if you have a scanner, you can e-mail them to him. We have one of the most extensive archives of crew photos in the world and would like to keep adding. ♦

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