

Sirago - The Early Years

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Based on a crumbling memory, I'll try to expand on some of our previous discussions from the '48 – '50 time period.

During the Christmas stand-down/upkeep in New London at the end of '47, the guns were removed from topside.

In February '48 (Boston, Mass) and in June '48 (New York, NY) there were weekend reserve cruises. These were highly undesirable assignments that required the boat to depart the op-area (Friday PM after a week of providing services) to arrive in Boston/New York in time to embark twenty or so Naval Reservists for a couple of days of diving and drills. The passengers were returned to port by 1600 Sunday so we could get back to the exercise area by 0800 Monday for another week of playing with destroyers or aircraft. No liberty was involved. The 1948 Bermuda trip took place in April and the 1948 fleet exercise started in September or October.

Sirago's home port was changed from New London to Norfolk in early 1949 – perhaps March.

During our post-conversion sea trials, we made 14.2 knots snorkeling on two engines at full speed. A little later, while enroute Norfolk to join SubRon Six, we blew the blower on #2 engine, probably while snorkeling at standard speed. Soon afterward, engine power limits were established for snorkeling submarines.

Sirago participated in the 1949 fleet exercise conducted in the Davis Strait for about three and a half weeks (including transit time). Several submarines opposed one or two hunter-killer groups, a small convoy of auxiliaries, and lots of destroyers. The weather was atrocious. Carriers could fly aircraft for only one-half day during the exercise. Sirago's conversion had added equipment, squeezed out two or three bunks, and made the boat very cramped. In addition, the Commodore had picked us for his flagship so we embarked him, the squadron operations officer, and about three enlisted staffers. The quality of life on board suffered accordingly.

While using the extended snorkel for air induction during very heavy weather north of Newfoundland, the snorkel mast slipped off the mechanical latch and dropped, rupturing the hydraulic supply line and putting the snorkel out of commission. A few days later, while preparing to surface, the forward messenger buoy carried away, taking with it the releasing stem and leaving a one-half inch hole in the forward torpedo room overhead. Upon surfacing, we found the messenger buoy cable wrapped around the sail and the port shaft. After chopping the buoy clear, we rendezvoused with Sea Leopard and an ASR in the meager lee of Bell Isle to transfer the Commodore, his staff, and some movies. The ASR's work boat furnished transportation. We went to Argentia to have a plug welded into the hole and pick up a few cases of booze, and then returned to the exercise.

In March of 1950 Sirago proceeded to New London for a scheduled interim docking. Scraping the hull for painting revealed a number of deep round pits in the pressure plating, principally in the stern area and in the way of safety and auxiliary tanks. The rest of the external plating was not affected. ComSubLant's material experts determined that the deepest pits needed to be welded up, and scheduled us for three weeks on Electric Boat's marine railway. We were required to undock and de-fuel (the after variable fuel tanks were in the pitted area). Incident to de-fueling we completely flooded the motor room and both main motors. For the next seventy-two hours we flushed the motors with hot battery water to rinse out the salt, then, while docked at the shipyard, the maneuvering room was sealed and space heaters were used to dry out the motors. At the end of three weeks, with our pits welded up and the main motor resistance readings up to ten thousand ohms, we undocked and returned to Norfolk. As I remember, we arrived on a Friday evening, Captain Kauffman relieved Captain Shea the following day, and on the following Monday we were out in the op-area to provide target services. When we shifted to the battery on the first dive, the main motors failed again and the next day we were on our way back to E.B. for a restricted availability of about two and a half months to pull, refurbish, and re-install the motors. Looking at the bright side, our presence in the New London area on 1 June

allowed us to witness VADM Fife's relief of command on a cold and stormy day. The attendance of ship's company from all ships in port was mandatory. About three weeks later, I left Sirago, with much less fanfare.



SIRAGO - 1948



The Modernized SIRAGO leaves Philadelphia in July, 1949