

Sirago - The Early Years

Volume 5, Issue 1 – Insert. By 4548 and 4952 Duty Section Crew Members

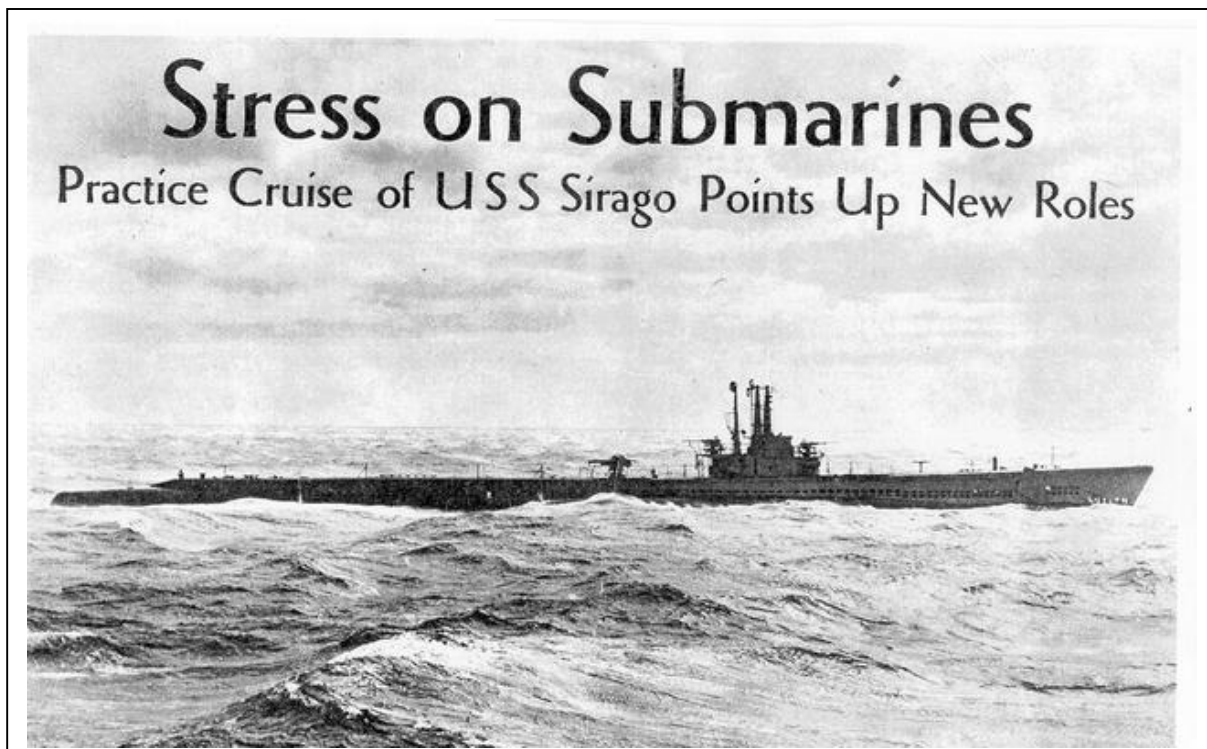
February 2004

This February 2004 Newsletter is debuting a new insert called “Sirago – The Early Years” and is dedicated to (and written by) those crewmembers from the 4548 and 4952 Duty Sections, many of whom remember the Sirago in its “fleet boat” configuration. This is appropriate as we approach the 2005 reunion, which celebrates the commissioning of the USS Sirago 60 years before.

THE CELEBRATION – THE AFTERMATH – Bill Campbell (LTJG 47-50)

Navy Day '47, the Sirago (SS485) was in Albany, NY, scheduled to leave for fleet exercises off Bermuda. A hurricane was veering to the northeast away from Florida and in New London. Ginny was in her third trimester with our first child. I was pacing, but made it in time for the run down the Hudson. At sea, the hurricane became an extra ingredient for the fleet problem. At one point, we were on the surface and moving into the eye and I was ordered to the bridge just in time to see a lonely stork circling the boat. After giving it directions to head north, I returned to the wardroom. Two hours later, a message was received – daughter born – celebration must wait until we hit the beach.

The opportunity came earlier than expected. An acute appendectomy on board resulted in orders to proceed to Bermuda. Celebration at the O-Club the next night started early. Two boxes of cigars went fast. When the Club closed, the celebration moved elsewhere. It was noted that, during the evening, the skipper was observed admiring a huge trophy sailfish on the Club bulkhead. It had been landed by one of the former Area Commanders. The consensus...why not bring it aboard? The “removal” from the darkened Club was easy and with a “borrowed” jeep quickly transported to the dock and moved to the torpedo-loading hatch. The dorsal fin needed cutting to fit and the operation was about to begin when the skipper appeared on deck. Back it goes.



The fish was returned to the top of the jeep. Unfortunately, it was oriented athwartships and after passing a light pole, the long beak suffered a large down angle. Back on the wall of the O-Club, it became the main topic of conversation on the base. I was granted leave to go see my new daughter, provided that I apologize to the admiral for the behavior of the wardroom.

Entering the admiral's office with hat in hand, I began the apology. I was stopped with a raised hand. "Hell, son," he said, "my wife has been bugging me to redecorate that Club since we've been here and this is now her big opportunity. Thanks to the Sirago and congratulations on a new daughter." And what a beautiful daughter!

Note: The Sirago returned to Bermuda two more times and the fish story was still alive...but the fish was in bad repair.

Discount Booze the Hard Way – Bill Campbell (LTJG 47-50)

The fleet problem in 1950 was between Greenland and Canada and conducted in high seas and strong wind. We were making an attack on a carrier task force and I, as diving officer of the Sirago, was having a helluva time maintaining depth. Wave action could be felt down to 150 feet. At periscope depth we would broach in the heavy sea. Going deep, we penetrated the screen and the captain wanted one last look at the carrier before firing. As we fired, we broached and struggled to go deep under the carrier. Her screw sliced the conning tower shears and bent one periscope but didn't affect our water-tight integrity. Meanwhile, on the carrier, an over-exuberant reporter fired off an unauthorized dispatch naming the Sirago as being struck by the carrier and last seen sinking. Needless to say, the wives in Norfolk were distraught for several hours until the errant report was retracted.

On the surface, we were ordered to Argentina for damage assessment before heading home. This visit presented an opportunity. Booze was very inexpensive in Argentina. With wish lists in hand, the shore party was ready. But who was on the dock to meet us? COMSUBLANT! While damage was being assessed, after some delay the admiral came on board to inspect. As he proceeded down and through the forward torpedo room, the shore party followed and stashed the booty in number one torpedo tube.

Upon return to New London, orders were, if Customs asked to examine any tubes, flood the tube, open the outer door, and fire!

A good torpedoman knows ALL the ways that torpedo tubes can be used in stressful situations.

