

Sirago Newsletter



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Stories from the Crew — Decommissioning

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The Decommissioning Process – Mike Bickel (LTJG)

Being the supply and food services officer, I had a unique perspective on the decommissioning process. First of all, we needed to have all the repair-parts petty officers assist in inventorying and offloading all spare parts. Amazingly, during this process rusty parts from storage magically began to take the place of chrome-plated parts installed—and the chrome-plated parts mysteriously disappeared. You'd go up the after-battery hatch one day with a bright chrome-plated hatch dog, suitable for showing aboard princesses and kings, and the next day you'd grab hold of something that looked like it was taken out of your home toilet tank.

Offloading food was actually fun. We had started a sort of "bucket brigade" to offload the canned goods, but then we wanted to get it done so shortcuts were taken. Cans were taken from storage in the after battery and tossed toward the hatch leading topside, and then the fellow at

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The End of a Journey

The Final Days – Joe Roche

The other day, I came upon a photo on Sirago's Web site that stopped me short. It was Sirago, tied up at some unrecognizable pier in Norfolk. The caption underneath stated, "Sirago in Norfolk just prior to being decommissioned."

She was tied up by herself—no other squadron boats near her. She looked so forlorn, as if she knew what was coming and was bereft of any hope of being saved from the cutting torch. How could that be? How could a cold, black steel cylinder surmise her ending? But she does. If you look real hard at that photo, you can tell.

She put in twenty-seven years of duty. Twenty-seven years worth of thousands of young men who served her. Their hopes, their fears, their dreams. The thoughts of families and sweethearts ashore. Of children, going to school for the first time. A birthday missed. A wedding anniversary uncelebrated. Holidays missed. The death of a loved one, who died while we were submerged making turns off the coast of some country whose name is long forgotten, but the pain of that death and the loved one is still etched forever in the mind. Tell me **She** didn't absorb the energy of those memories, somehow, into the steel of her hull.

Twenty-seven years and thousands of "clear the bridge," "rig for deep submergence," "prepare to snorkel two main engines," and "lookouts to the bridge." How about the excitement generated by heading for home after spending four or five weeks at sea. The thoughts of a hot shower and a cold beer at Bells. Setting the maneuvering watch. Damn, we're almost home! Sirago makes a hard left turn into Pier 22 and glides smoothly (sometimes) towards her slot. A line handler hurls a monkey fist to the inboard boat or pier line handler. Stop bells ring on the engines. Quiet now, except for the inboard induction valves being spun shut. The heat from the just shut down engines, radiating throughout the engine rooms. Lockers, opening and slamming shut! Dress uniforms being hastily donned. White hats jammed down low over the eyes. Gangway! Make way for

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the bottom just threw it straight upward, shooting it about 8–10 feet above the topside level. A fellow there would wait until it would come hurtling down at him and would just slap it aside (so as not to kill the fellow below) and it would fall in this big pile on the deck. This was happening in tubes aft at the same time with their food locker and storage brigade. People coming toward the boat from the pier got this really strange view of #10 and #303 cans ejecting from multiple hatches like depth charges fired off a skimmer.

Decomm Ceremony – Harold Haugland (QM1)

I was topside in my whites with the rest of the guys before the decommissioning ceremony. The very large EM1 Jamaican (Woodrow Norman) who had been the Career Counselor (and who had "assigned" me as his relief) came up and we all sort of danced around trying not to touch anything that would stain or dirty our dress whites. Anyway, officer Mike Bickel came up and there was the other young Officer (Randy Morgan) with him. So Norman and I are watching these two officers in choker white war suits complete with swords and Woodrow leans over and says in that deep Jamaican accent:

"When I become an Officer, I'm not going to settle for one of those puny things. I'm getting me a Machete!"

◆



Norman Woodrow (EM1) & Machete

liberty call. Gonna see mamma and the kids. The J-50 sailors giving way to the "Brown Baggers," so they can go home to their wife and kids.

Are you going to tell me **She** doesn't have that energy stored somewhere in her black hull? That energy, that helped drive her on, while her young men worked tirelessly to keep her in service. Begging, borrowing, or more likely, stealing parts to hold her together.

There was no money forthcoming from anywhere or from anyone that gave a damn about diesel boats. Their time was over. A new era was upon us, and Rickover had a blank check for his nukes and made sure nothing trickled down to us. Someone even stole one of my engines out of the forward engine room, for a damn machine that could blow bubbles. I guess that was someone's idea of a joke.

In human years, twenty-seven years is very young. I guess submarine years are like dog years and that made her very, very old.

There isn't a degausser anywhere in the world that can excise that magnetic field! With one exception: a welder's cutting torch.

There she sits. Still forlorn. Knowing the end is near, without hope for a reprieve. Sitting there, with all that energy from all those years of memories. Stored in some existential battery, hidden somewhere in her. No crewmember ever saw that battery. But it was there, somewhere. That somewhere is in the memories of every man who served on board Sirago. The energy that made Sirago who she was and who we are, will remain in the universe as long as one of us is alive. Because we are the ones who perpetuate her memory, by sharing those memories. ◆



Sirago Reunion 2005 – Early Information

Mike Bickel

As of the printing of this newsletter, we have 117 Crewmembers who have indicated their intentions to come to the 2005 Reunion (18 months from now). Those people are listed below by their duty section. My address, phone number, and e-mail address are shown below, so please contact me if you are planning to attend this event.

I thought I'd give you some of the information we now know about the reunion. Contracts have already been signed for the hotel and for the dinner cruise we will be offering. The "theme" of this reunion is the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the commissioning of the USS Sirago, which happened on August 13th, 1945, just 2 days before the end of WWII. She is, in fact, the LAST submarine commissioned during the war and also the last combatant Navy Vessel commissioned during hostilities.

Our "time" for the event is August 11th – August 14th, 2005. This is a Thursday arrival date and a Sunday departure. Our place to stay in Portsmouth is the Yoken's Comfort Inn, which has an indoor pool, whirlpool spa, and exercise room, complimentary morning paper, fresh-brewed coffee, and Deluxe Continental Breakfast. Most importantly, it is the most economical alternative in the area with rooms (single or double occupancy) running from \$139.95 - \$159.95/night. While this may seem high compared to previous reunions, we will be in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, at the height of their tourist season, and most hotels are in excess of \$200/night. You have 18 months to set aside the room and travel costs and about a year to set aside other event costs, which will be first published in our August 2004 newsletter. We will begin collecting for this reunion late in 2004. The reunion will have a dinner cruise, base tour, shopping, etc., in addition to our hospitality room, banquet, farewell breakfast, and other usual events.

Contact Mike Bickel to get details: RMBICKEL@STUPP.COM / 1125 Villaview Dr. / Manchester, MO 63021 / (636) 225-7528.

Sirago Crew PLANNING TO COME by Duty Section: (117):

DS4548 (7): Bill Campbell, Jerry Casey, Jim Gavigan, Charlie Johnson, Riley Keysor, Jim McCullough, Ron Thibideau

DS4952 (7): "CUSH" Cushing, Duane Gow, Ray Gundy, Bob Kaufman, Norm LeBlanc, Gerry Magee, Joe Rock

DS5356 (9): George Albert, Dick Clifford, Don Hall, Bob Liland, Robert Mazurek, Buddy Shumake, James Thompson, John Tumilty, "Wally" Walraven

DS5760 (16): Paull Anderson, Dick Andrews, Wayne Booton, Paul Curry, Roger Dean, Bill Dort, George Goodwin, David Hauer, George Hinda, Mel Laubach, Vic Lombardo, Glenn Neal, Ed Shaffer, Bill Shamphan, Bud Tolbert, Harold Webster

DS6164 (19): Bill Abbruzzese, Don Amorosi, Ted Anthony, Bob Boddiford, Bruce Boughton, Dale Craig, Lonnie "Ray" Haley, Joe Hoffmann, Jim Hughes, Larry McClintock, Joe Roche, Ralph Schmidt, Roy Scott, "Butch" Sites, Al Standish, Jerry Stellick, Ray Tholen, Ralph Wiggins, Marv Yokum

DS6568 (28): Ken Anderton, Gary Beasley, Bill Clegg, Virgil Clemmer, Bill Collins, Pat Conroy, Dennis Duren, Bob Ewing, Ron Flint, Dave Glaser, Garry Goetschius, Nate Isenhour, Bob Karge, "Tex" Loftin, Marvin Mayes, JD Mayo, Rich McCamant, Bob Michaud, Ira Nerzig, Joe Palermo, Doug (Big Robbie) Roberts, Stanley Robinson, Bob Rosen, Tom Sawyer, Rob Schutte, Dean Sedgwick, Chuck Veir, Marshall Woods.

DS6972 (31): David Ackerman, Robert Bell, Frank Berlingeri, Mike Bickel, Dennis Boland, Russell Burrows, Ray Bussard, Frank Campbell, Matt Cola, "Rusty" Curtis, Doug Davis, Jack Enos, Bob Flora, Tom Foglesong, Doug Fox, Ken "Stewburner" Frazier, Frank George, Robert Holt, Bill Huskey, Ron Kennedy, Andy Knauer, "Johnny D" Lee, Randy Morgan, Tom O'Brien, Keith Owens, Michael Peterson, Lanny Renken, Fred Thompson, Marty Valdez, Jim Ware, Paul York.

STOREKEEPER REPORT

Wally Walraven

Most all of you have seen the August and November newsletter in which we show ALL the goods available for sale. They are also shown on our Web site (www.sirago.com) under the photo album called ITEMS FOR SALE.

The "procedure" is to contact ME (Wally) via phone (757) 420-4946 or e-mail: wallsis@juno.com to have me ship the item and then you simultaneously write a check made out to USS Sirago (marked with item(s) you wish to buy) and mail it to: Garry Goetschius / 3620 Locus Circle East / Prospect, KY 40059-9020.

In this issue, I am pushing playing cards (double bridge decks) for \$10.00 per double deck, postage paid.



Joe Roche
74 Lincoln Ave.
Pearl River, NY 10965-1707

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

DUTY SECTION NEWS

Recently Deceased Sirago Crewmembers:

Bobbie Joe Brown (TM3, 71-72 died 10/20/03)
Thomas (Doc) Cali (HMC, 51-57 died 10/20/03)
Ray (Peaches) Coburn (ENC, 53-57 died 2001)
John F. Fagan (LT, 53-54 died 9/17/03)
Kenneth G. Walter (MMCS, 58-66 died 12/3/03)
-----*Sailor, rest your oar*

DUTY SECTION STATUS

Duty Section 4548: Alive: 68 Deceased: 72 Seeking: 130

Duty Section 4952: Alive: 52 Deceased: 57 Seeking: 87

Duty Section 5356: Alive: 66 Deceased: 41 Seeking: 74

Duty Section 5760: Alive: 91 Deceased: 40 Seeking: 90

Duty Section 6164: Alive: 122 Deceased: 24 Seeking: 142

Duty Section 6568: Alive: 138 Deceased: 23 Seeking: 100

Duty Section 6972: Alive: 134 Deceased: 12 Seeking: 56

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