

Sirago Newsletter



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Stories from the Crew --- Memorable Liberty Ports

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One of the best ports to visit was Halifax, Nova Scotia. Line #4 crew (Bob Davies, Charlie Graninger, Alan Imboden, & Tom Foglesong) got a first-hand look at the greeting by our host ship, the HMCS Bonaventure, on June 1, 1969. We saw the bottom of the carrier's deck just before Sirago hit one of the deck's drain pipes. It looked as if someone had taken a large can opener to the steel on the port side near the After Torpedo Room hatch. After securing the maneuvering watch, some of us got to enjoy the hospitality from our hosts. We got to share their rum rations!

I'll always have fond memories of Halifax. Although we were the foreign navy, Andy Knauer and I were treated very well.

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It Wasn't the Hilton

Getting Along - Joe Roche

Serving on a WWII vintage submarine in the early 1960s was a wonderful example and testament of being able to "get along" with others. The confines of these 311-foot sardine tubes did not allow for the same isolation or privacy that a Buddhist sitting in meditation on some hilltop or in a forest may require. Aboard Sirago, if you wanted privacy, you went to the head. That was it!

So it is that, with a sense of belonging, young men were able to "get along" with their shipmates. Sociologists should have studied the submarine force to see why these men were able to get along with each other with a tolerance that would have stunned them into unbelievability. The same for the psychologists. They just would not have understood, period!

They would have thought the grab ass-ing, the hassling of some dink NQP, or the blatant sexual references to just about everything under the sun, would be the most outrageous form of antisocial behavior ever witnessed on one of the government's Ships of the Line, and would have recommended immediate Section Eight discharges for almost every man aboard.

What possibly could have been the reason that seventy people chose to live in a submerged pipe. Where the most elemental forms of hygiene were disregarded or not allowed. Where changing the "linen" meant turning your fart sack and pillow case inside out so often that Doc would point out to you that "this is not a pig sty you're living in." To which most of us replied, "really?" Where fresh water was as valuable a commodity as the fuel oil

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Bob Garvey - Duty Section 6972

In March in 1970 the Sirago was tied up to pier in San Juan, Puerto Rico. An ensign from a nearby destroyer decided he wanted to visit Ensign Rusty Curtis. He must have recently graduated from the Naval Academy or OCS. He approached the brow and requested permission to go onboard and fired off a snappy salute, but unfortunately he fell off the brow. I have never seen such dedication as he held the salute even as he disappeared under the water with his hat still attached to his head. The crew of the Sirago fished him out of the water and the embarrassed officer when back to his ship.

Mel Rycus - Duty Section 5356

NATO maneuvers, Gitmo, Cuba. We were stationed on the Island before heading for Keflavik, Iceland. The Captain of the Naval Base was cultivating this huge banana stalk in front of Headquarters. The night before our departure, we shimmied up the tree with a borrowed meat cleaver, and cut the stalk down. It took three of us to carry the bananas. Well, being electricians, we stored the bananas in the After Battery well where they ripened marvelously. On the way to Iceland we shared our bounty with the few in the know, and our poor supply officer kept wondering where we were all getting the bananas.

David Cameron - Duty Section 5356 as told by His son John Cameron

Among my father David Cameron's (52-53) favorite stories from his sub days was the trip to Iceland. According to him, along with several other Guppies, the SS485 ran northward along Newfoundland, then past the coast of Greenland to Reykjavik, capital of Iceland. His 35 mm camera captured the stark beauty of the snow-capped mountains edging down to the deep blue sea. In what probably violated official secrecy, he also took pictures of the other submarines in the flotilla (including several through the periscope lens), and there, too, are photographs of him bundled up in the pea coat on the narrow, wave-washed deck of his boat, glinting silver in the afternoon light (the latter is posted on the Web site). He said that occasionally they would supplement their diet with fresh shark—caught by baiting a large hook with a beefsteak at the end of a

was to the running of the engines, but much more scarce. Where you're able to get two weeks at sea on one pair of dungarees, two pairs of socks and four pairs of skivvies. For us enginemen, a bucket of hot water in the lower flats was as close to a shower as you got. It's amazing how your perception is formed by the environment you live in. During our '63 Med cruise, (I think) Bob Carey arranged a swap with another MM3 from a tin can we were operating with. When he came back to the boat all he talked about was taking a shower every night. Talk about luxury.

No one seemed to mind, though. For all intents and purposes, we all were in the same boat (pun intended). Someone may have had a choice bunk in some out-of-the-way location in the after battery. But Hogan's Alley remained a veritable pig sty. Dirty clothes piled in corners or hanging from bunk bags, paperback novels that were in worse shape than the Dead Sea Scrolls (still making the rounds, with certain very descriptive pages torn from them) sticking out from under pillows, awaiting the next reader who, as he arrives at the place where the pages are torn out, will scream out a curse about "getting to the best part of the book and some SOB tore them out." It wasn't until Doc Lay had "titivate" ship day and the white lights went on, only then could the devastation of the compartment be seen.

The chow was the best. And the worst. We had mid-rats, as in midnight rations. But, ahh mid-rats. A more appropriate name could not be found. Unless the cook made some fresh bread or sticky buns, mid-rats consisted of "stuff" that defied description. Bologna had an aura about it. A greenish hue, that changed colors as you turned it in the light. First green, then yellowish, then—well, you get the picture. The butter was covered with a scabrous inch-thick layer of brownish looking vulcanized...butter? Same situation with the mayo. But guys ate this stuff up as if it were their last meal.

For me, all the above adds up to one thing. I was where I asked to be. I spent some time on a bird farm. Now that was hell! Showers every night, uniform of the day after 1600, Masters at Arms

stout line, then finishing the catch with their .45 caliber automatics.

In Reykjavik, he would remember his Alabama shipmate attempting to order a sandwich in his broad Dixie dialect. Hardly fluent in English, the waitress returned with pickled herring open-faced on bread, something my Scots-raised father enjoyed but nothing his Southern buddy could stomach.

The Iceland trip was as close as my father would get to any military action in the war. They fired their torpedoes a few times in mock war games, hitting a British aircraft carrier with the flares that substituted for live warheads. Otherwise, as he had desired, his sea service was uneventful.

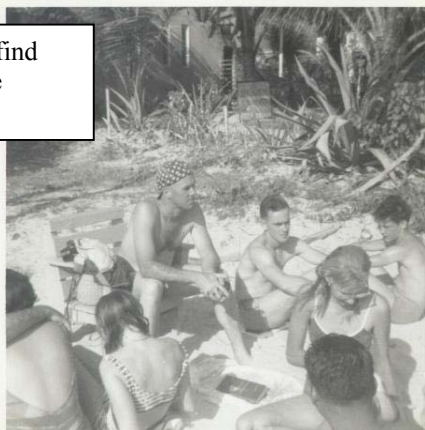
Capt. Cushing - Duty Section 4952

Before leaving for our Med trip in August, 1951, our DivCom, Russ Kefauver, told us that his wife, an enthusiastic seamstress, had heard about a marvelous new sewing machine the Italians had developed, which had all kinds of gears, cams, levers, and gadgets enabling it to do fancy stitching and unheard-of things. Our assignment was to purchase a Necchi machine at the first large city in which we could shop.

Upon hitting Naples, CO Bob Kaufman, XO Ed Hannon and I headed for the Galleria, the long-established European prototype of our malls. Therein we found a sewing supplies shop and, in my best Italian, I stated firmly, "Ho bisogno una macchina da cucire - Necchi."

Her immediate answer was "No! No! Singer! Necchi no good." She adamantly refused to sell us a Necchi, so we had to report back to the DivCom that his order was not obeyed.

Crew members find Beauties and the Beach – 1965



running all over that ship looking for anything to write you up about, 25 minutes in the chow line, every meal every day. An insignificant cog in a very large machine.

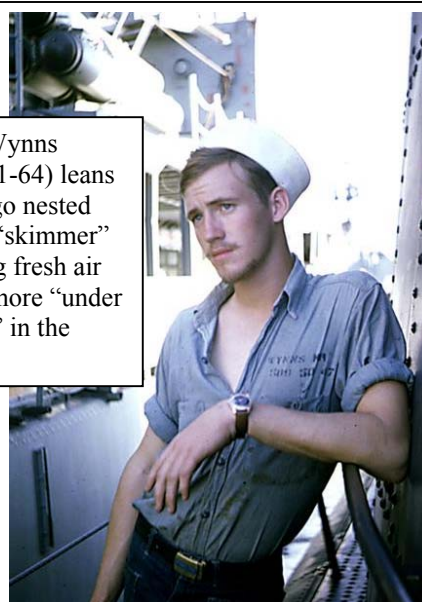
So we volunteered for submarine service. We lived crowded together in a steel tube. With no showers, some of us had no beds, we hot-bunked. We ate some of the finest chow the Navy ever provided and also ate the worst. We had no ship's laundry, so we wore our dungarees until they could stand by themselves. We breathed some of the foulest air imaginable and some of the sweetest. Our eardrums were stretched beyond human endurance when we pulled a vacuum. We worked around the clock many times to keep Sirago on station. We didn't get paid overtime or get an extra day off. You just got the feeling that maybe; just maybe, you were playing an important part in something a lot bigger than yourself. But we were young and nothing was bigger than "you" when you're twenty years old.

So, to the sociologists and shrinks I can only say, we were young, dumb, and carefree, and wanted to serve in and be with the very best the Navy had to offer. We did that of our own free will.

Forty years ago, this past February, I left Sirago and the Navy, but the memories remain.

Joe Roche (EN3, 61-64)

Harry Wynns (TM3 61-64) leans up to a "skimmer" enjoying fresh air before more "under sea ops" in the pipe.



REUNION NOTICE!

Mike Bickel (RMBICKEL@STUPP.COM)

Please remember that our next reunion will take place in Portsmouth, NH from August 11-14th, 2005. This is still more than a year away, but approaching with constant bearing, decreasing range. This is a Thursday-through-Sunday reunion with most folks checking in on Thursday. We are considering having an earlier arrival for those who want to golf, and we are in the process of making reservations. For "golfing," we would ask that you arrive on Wednesday evening (the 10th) and we'll tee off early on Thursday the 11th before the masses arrive (masses = non-golfers). Notices, pricing, tentative schedules, and so on will be coming out in the NEXT newsletter (August 2004).

As of this moment, we have 127 crew members who have told us they are planning on attending. This is posted on our Web site WWW.SIRAGO.COM under the INFORMATION tab. Let me know if you are coming!

The "theme" of the upcoming reunion is the celebration of the 60th anniversary of Sirago's commissioning, which was August 13, 1945, just 2 days before the end of the war.

Joe Roche
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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

DUTY SECTION NEWS

Recently Deceased Sirago Crewmembers:

Tyrone Myers (IC1, 63-67 died 3/1/2004)

Joe Searcy (EM1, 69-72 died 11/29/03)

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



Joe Searcy on maneuvering watch.

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