

# The After Battery Rat

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## Smoke

It's hard to believe for some but there is an aging group of men bound together by smoke. Not the smoke people ordinarily draw into their lungs for a buzz, legal or illegal, but stinky old diesel smoke made by burning hydrocarbons. It's burned in great big old noisy diesel engines designed for railroad locomotives and transplanted into a submarine, of all places.

This smoke binds them together with wispy chains stronger than the finest hardened steel. Men that sit around remembering shipmates and times good and bad, their memories brought to them on gray blue clouds. Clouds of it shot out over ports of the seven seas, on lighting off for going to sea. Underway and across those seas the smoke settles to an efficiency haze, but the diesel smoke smell follows them. The smoke and sounds that shut down when reaching homeport after many days alone at sea.

Today, these old timers travel many miles to see, hear and once more catch that wonderful reminder of their youth. With tears in the eyes of some they lean forward to breathe it in. They take photographs of diesel smoke clouds belching from exhaust pipes of museum piece subs. Back home they show them to others and post video clips on the internet. Others sit and wait for those clips to download over slow internet connections, just to see that smoke and hear the sound.

It is said that the sense of smell brings back the strongest memories. If so then we are lucky ones, because our smoke is strong and memorable. Along with our smoky chains we have those memories and neither can be removed from our hearts.

Many a submariner says, One more time, just one more time. For some, that means to go out and make another dive, for others just to hear the roar and to smell that smoke. Me, I'd like to yank a throttle lever, feel the deck plates shudder under my feet, hear the sounds, smell the smoke and be with those shipmates past that are bound together by these things.

Just one more time and for a little while.

## Contribution from "Boy Throttleman"

We are keeping the "After Battery Rat" Logo (below) for this section of the newsletter, but this article is written by a fellow named Michael Hemming – a person called "Boy Throttleman" in many of Dex Armstrong's writings. As Dex himself is a bit under stress, what with his "blonde bombshell" having been diagnosed with a severe form of ovarian cancer, Mike Hemming takes over for Dex in contributing to our celebration of smoke boat memories. Mike is a paying Associate Member of the Sirago Crew.

Please also note the epilog on the back side of this sheet.



# Epilog

By Mike Bickel & Rich McCamant

We have seen the near shut down of the New London (aka Groton) Submarine Base and the total disappearance of our own “smokeboats” from the fleet. We hear about other countries with modern diesel boats and secretly think that perhaps they might be able to outperform many more powerful nuclear boats. We read books about such theoretical battles between nuclear and diesel, and we cheer for the diesel because we were aboard those old smokeboats and knew what they could do. Sort of like David and Goliath. We have a number of people in our Sirago Association who were only aboard Sirago for a short period of time... the rest of their time spent in the nuclear navy... and yet many of those folks value highly that short time aboard Sirago and are proud that they were actually part of the “smokeboat navy”. People like Dex Armstrong and Mike Hemming help us to remember what it was like and help us to value that very special time.

We, the crew members of the USS Sirago, want to not only perpetuate the memory of our own beloved boat, but also, that of other smokeboats and the crews with which we worked so closely as part of Submarine Squadron 6 – Norfolk, VA. In the 2003 reunion we were able to have a joint reunion with the USS Sea Leopard (SS483). This next reunion (2007) we will have the opportunity to sortie with not only the Sea Leopard, but also the USS Cutlass (SS478).

The Sirago spent the vast majority of its life as a SUBRON 6 boat and knew well the Sea Leopard and the Cutlass. Of course there were many others as well. As near as we can remember, the following boats were part of the old Squadron 6 as SMOKEBOATS:

## **COMSUBDIV 61**

USS COBBLER (SS344)  
USS SEA LEOPARD (SS483)  
USS SIRAGO (SS485)  
USS GRAMPUS (SS523)  
USS CUTLASS (SS478)  
USS CUBERA (SS347)

## **COMSUBDIV 62**

USS REQUIN (SSR481)  
USS REDFIN (SSR272)  
USS RAY (SSR271)  
USS POMPON (SSR267)  
USS SAILFISH (SSR572)

## **COMSUBDIV 63**

USS RUNNER (SS476)  
USS TORSK (SS423)  
USS ARGONAUT (SS475)  
USS BARBERO (SSG317)  
USS SEA LION (APSS315)  
USS MEDREGAL (SS480)

We have determined that these were the primary “SMOKEBOATS” of SUBRON 6 although there were a few others who came into and out of our Squadron such as the USS Carp (SS338) and some modern diesels who spent a brief stint including the USS Barbel (SS580), the USS Blueback (SS581), and the USS Bonefish (SS582).

These boats comprise what we are starting to call the **SUBRON SIX SMOKE BOAT SISTERS**. You will begin to see this group referred to as the **S.S.S.B.S.** We need to know if YOU were aboard any of these boats (other than Sirago) and if so, we would like for you to write or email Rich McCamant about this – you can see his address, phone number, and email address on the LOST & FOUND CREW insert in this same newsletter.

**Watch for MORE information about the RETURN OF THE S.S.S.B.S. We're out there .... just off your shores... probably just sitting quietly on the “layer” waiting for the right moment to sortie our forces.**

*Mike & Rich*