

# Sirago Newsletter

Volume 2, Issue 3

August 2001

## “The Great 72° Roll” from the 6972 Duty Section

*Storm off Cape Hatteras Almost Sinks USS Sirago*

**Mike Bickel**  
Duty Section 6972

This particular time, I get to share a story from my own time period. Various contributors from the 6972 Duty Section have given their perspective on this unusual event. A 72° Degree roll is pretty significant, so hold on to your seats for the ride of your life. Oh..... and speaking of holding on to your seat, wasn't it LT. Ackerman who was in the officers' head at the time?

**Mike Bickel (ENS):** I was a “boot recruit” in late February, early March 1971 when this incident occurred. We were on our way back to Norfolk from the Virgin Islands – a nice place to be in the dead of winter. I wasn't qualified to do squat so I was up on the bridge with LT Mel Dresbach who was OD for the 0400 watch. There was a very nasty storm off Cape Hatteras and, in fact, Norfolk was reporting the worst snow storm they had ever had. The seas had built up to 50' swells which, in the early dawn light seemed like giant mountains covered with snow. Eslick was the

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## Tragic Auto Accidents!

*May/June 2001 Auto Crashes Kill 2 Crew Members*

**Mike Bickel**  
Duty Section 6972

Captain and Mrs. James Wilson, former CO of the USS Sirago ( 63-64) both attended the latest reunion. Within a couple of weeks of the reunion, they were in a tragic auto accident which put Jim in a coma and broke Mary Emma's collar bone. Jim never regained consciousness and died on June 20<sup>th</sup>. Below is a photo of Jim back in the Sirago days (congratulating Joe Roche) and one of him at the reunion.



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lookout but he was so deathly seasick that all he was doing was puking over the starboard side. The Captain (CDR Shaffer) was trying to somehow get to Norfolk before the biggest part of the storm hit. Seas and a 50+ knot steady wind were from the west – we were traveling north in the troughs and taking our worst rolls to starboard. It was still dark when Mel called the Captain on the sound powered phone and recommended that we secure the watch on the bridge for safety's sake and because we were getting an occasional splash through the upper conning tower hatch which was pissing off the helmsman, and also an occasional douche into the engine rooms through the main induction. The captain told us to just keep things as they were as visibility was extremely poor, and he didn't trust making sweeps on the periscope.

**Greg Bell (ETR3):** It was before dawn dark and the Conn and Control room were rigged for red. I was positioned on the bench lockers next to and across the passageway from Radio with my feet wedged up against the Radar Aux cabinets holding them closed because every time the boat rolled the interlocks would pop shutting down the Radar. We were running on the surface in the trough with all diesels on line. We couldn't snorkel on the surface on two engines and maintain steerage way. Everyone had makeshift inclinometers. We even had one in the Control room forward and above the Gyro table. It was a piece of line with a spoon tied to it with the COW calling out the degrees because the Bubble inclinometers only went to 30 degrees port or starboard. We were taking water down the hatch periodically as the waves would hit the sail and travel up and over the bridge.

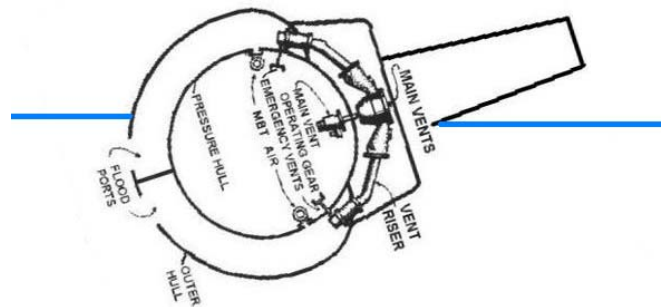
**Doug Fox (EM3):** I was on watch in the control room at the time. The boat was a mess from the heavy rolls, and people everywhere were sick, standing watches with #10 cans and trash bags for vomit. I can not remember the names, but a few of us were sitting where the emergency helm was, watching the inclinometer swing wildly. Standard rolls at the time were in the 45 - 55 degree range, and we were saying . come on, 56 . . 56 . . anything to keep our minds occupied so that we would not require a #10 can! I went aft to the crews mess (for what I could not say) and remember standing between the tables, talking to someone who was in front of the deep sink. Without warning, the boat lurched to starboard, catapulting me

OVER the head of this person. I had time to put my forearm out for protection, as I bounced off the cup rack, landing in the deep sink! For that split second, as I sat there wondering what the hell happened, I remember looking at the top of the coffee pot . . and then through the hatch into control, where there was a SOLID 'hatch diameter' slug of green sea water pouring down from the Conn. The boat was still on it's side as I began to climb out of the sink and make my way into control, almost walking on the high pressure blow manifold. There was a lanyard hanging below the conning tower hatch that I grabbed, trying to close it, to no avail. Someone joined me, and the two of us, standing in this solid stream of COLD sea water, were able to close it.

**Lanny Renken (IC3):** I remember most the pale faces of the crew and groping for someone or something to hang on to. Electrical fires sparked along the bulkheads inside junction boxes, where water from the bilge had gotten high enough to enter the boxes.

**Randy Crawford (EN2):** I was throttleman in the After Engine room w/ Berlinger as oiler. I was thrown against and on top of #3 engine. All I heard was the thunder of the water running through the 22" main induction piping and knew if I didn't get that valve shut there was going to be more water in the compartment then I wanted to be with.

**Bickel:** Everything went silent on the bridge except for a giant "whoosh" sound as the port ballast tank flood port came out of the water. Ended up we flooded both engine rooms, the Conn had 4 feet of water, flooded the pump room and soiled 7 dozen pairs of skivvies. ♦



*This is what 72 Degrees Looks like. We probably did more like 80.*

**CALENDAR OF FUTURE EVENTS**

**REUNION 2003 – NORFOLK BY POPULAR DEMAND!**

NORFOLK / VA BEACH, VIRGINIA

APR 30<sup>TH</sup> – MAY 4<sup>TH</sup> 2003

SIRAGO REUNION – NORFOLK / VA BEACH AREA SOMEWHERE

Please keep this date open. I know it seems like such a long time from now, but much planning must be done to make sure we can have a great reunion. Due to our expanded size, we have now officially “outgrown” the Lake Wright Resort as we expect a “crew count” of 160-200 next time and a total crowd approaching 300.

We are starting to see if there is a possibility to engage facilities in the Virginia Beach area, but this is not certain at this time. If we DO get such accommodations, our theme may be “Hit the Beach”. We’ll keep you updated!

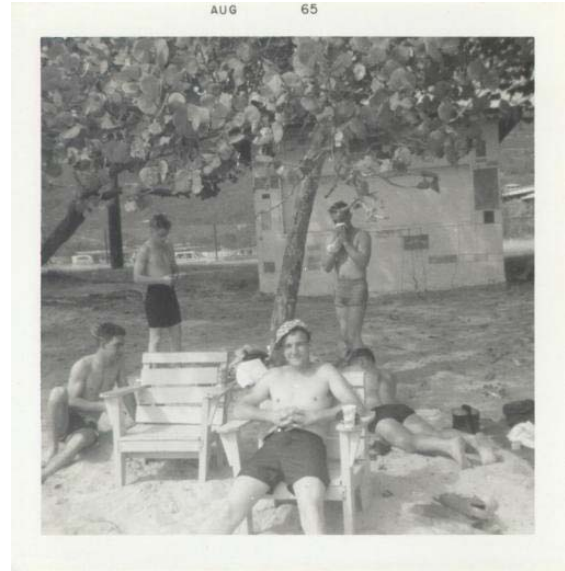
**NEW CONTRIBUTING WRITER**

**DEX ARMSTRONG – AUTHOR OF “AFTER BATTERY RAT”**

You probably noticed that there was an “extra page” included in this newsletter written by a fellow named Dex Armstrong. Those of us who are “on line” are pretty aware of his crazy and demented writings, but wanted to make sure that everyone had an opportunity to enjoy his ramblings. Dex was aboard the Requin, Torsk, and some other boats and has a particularly delightful way of writing... at least that’s what most of our “on-liners” think. I am hoping that his writings do not offend anyone. I have talked to him on a few occasions and he is truly a great guy. I have made him an honorary member of our crew, so he will be getting an “on line copy” of our newsletter. When I asked him if we could re-print his writings he said “You have touched the heart of an old bottom feeding E-3 who loved his service in the boats.” ♦♦♦



Don Hulick (SK3) who served aboard Sirago from 1962 – 1966 also met with a tragic end just 2 days before Jim Wilson died. On June 18<sup>th</sup>, he was in an auto accident and died instantly. Pictured below is Don in 1965 enjoying some “beach time”.



Both Don and Jim were very happy to have been “found” by the Sirago crew and enjoyed communicating with old friends. Each of us who had the opportunity to know and to acquaint ourself with these two fellows feel particularly honored to have enjoyed their company before they made their unexpected departure on their “Eternal Patrol”.

- *Sailors, Rest your Oars*



**Microfilm Research**

Over the past two years, the Sirago “found alive” crew has grown from 150 to almost 500. Our goal is to increase this number to 600 before the next reunion. To do this, we have decided to add 5 more microfilm tapes to our library. Each of these tapes costs \$34 and I am happy to inform you that through generous contributions from on-line crew members, this project is fully funded. If any of you “snail mailers” would like to chip in \$7.00 or so toward future microfilm purchases, it would be greatly appreciated. Thanks also to all those 290+ “Sirago Booster” contributors who keep this newsletter going! ♦♦♦

## SIRAGO - TRIVIA

Did you know that the Commissioning Crew adopted a stray dog they named "Sir Ago". The dog was a faithful travelling companion and would go out to sea with them during their early trials. Sir Ago slept in the After Battery and one of the crew cleaned up the mess. The funny part is that the crew thought it was a male. Renamed **her** "Ago" after discovery. Later on, the crew got smarter about girls.



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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

## DUTY SECTION NEWS

Here's the latest tally on Duty Sections. We're hoping to build "Crew Found Alive" to 600 by next reunion:

**DS 4548:** 43 Found Alive, 25 Last Dive

**DS 4952:** 48 Found Alive, 28 Last Dive

**DS 5356:** 56 Found Alive, 20 Last Dive

**DS 5760:** 77 Found Alive, 19 Last Dive

**DS 6164:** 59 Found Alive, 7 Last Dive

**DS 6568:** 88 Found Alive, 10 Last Dive

**DS 6972:** 111 Found Alive, 9 Last Dive

**DS ?????:** 6 Found Alive, 2 Last Dive

### Photopoint News:

About 1200 photos now on our web site. When you go to the link below choose the photos. Album list password ss485.

<http://service.freesitenow.com/Sirago/>

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