

USS Sea Leopard

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What Happened to the SEA LEOPARD???

Mike Bickel

To the right you will see a photo (kind of grainy) of the USS Sea Leopard (SS483) in 1968 with the high North Atlantic sail. This was 5 years before she was decommissioned and sold to the Brazilians.

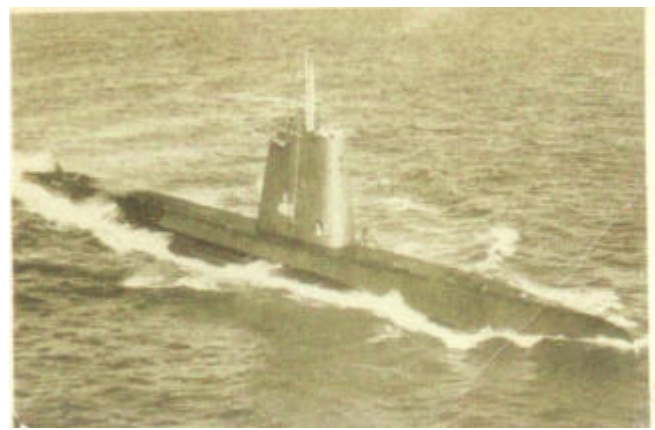
You will also notice (lower photo to right) that same high North Atlantic sail of the Sea Leopard (called S. Bahia) in Brazil at the Museo Nacional do Mar (National Sea Museum), located in Santa Catarina in the town of Sao Francisco do Sul (San Francisco of the South). She was given to the museum by the Brazilian Navy in 1995.

The trail gets a bit foggier after this point in time. However, due to the superior sleuthing of our crack USS Sirago team of Web trackers and especially Darryl Brunsvold, our Copy Editor, we think we know what happened to this Tench-class “Smoke-Boat Sister” of Sirago.

But first...let’s muddy up the waters a bit. Here is an extract from an article published in the Washington Post on February 25, 2000:

TSOYING NAVAL BASE, Taiwan—Taiwan's navy calls it the Sea Leopard, but it looks like the Beached Whale. Entering this cramped 56-year-old submarine should be a journey into the past. There are two similar subs in museums in Philadelphia and Mount Pleasant, S.C. Unfortunately for Taiwan, however, the Sea Leopard is very much in the present. With a hull pockmarked by age, rust eating its sides and an engine and pressurization system that cannot keep up, the Guppy-class sub, built in Philadelphia in the closing days of World War II, makes up one-quarter of Taiwan's submarine fleet.

The article goes on to describe the relationship between Taiwan and China, and describes this “Sea Leopard” as pretty decrepit and run down. Because of this article, many Sea Leopardites naturally assumed that their boat was in the active service of Taiwan. Seems logical...but there is more to the story.



OK—so we know that in 1973, the Sea Leopard was sold to Brazil and was re-named the S. Bahia, and that there is a boat sitting (as of 1995) at a museum in Brazil, labeled S.12 and called the S. Bahia (which means Bay in Portuguese). We assume it is the same boat, right? Let's muddy up the waters a bit more.

Darryl Brunsvold uncovered that Brazil already had a boat in their possession called the Bahia and numbered S.12 when they got the USS Sea Leopard from the U.S. Navy. The "previous" Bahia (S.12) was none other than the USS Plaice (SS390), which was sold to the Brazilian Navy in 1963 for training in submarine warfare, renamed BAHIA (S.12), and retired from active service in the Brazilian Navy in 1973, at which time she became a museum ship in Santos, Brazil. So...are you confused yet? Both the USS Plaice and the USS Sea Leopard were sold to Brazil at different times and, concurrent with Brazil taking the old USS Plaice (Bahia) out of their commission and putting it in a museum, the USS Sea Leopard was renamed "S. Bahia," labeled with the same number (S.12), and put on active duty. This happened in 1973. Then, in 1993, the Sea Leopard (aka S. Bahia) was put dockside and relegated to training duties until 1995, at which time she was converted into a "dockside museum"—this one being in Santa Catarina.

So...which one of those two boats is the one floating around Taiwan? You'd never guess this in a million years! Neither one!!

If you were reading the Washington Post article on the preceding page carefully, you would have noticed that it said "Taiwan's navy calls it the Sea Leopard..." That's the clue. It ends up that Taiwan also likes to name boats after fish and other aquatic animals. The Hai Shin, for example is translated as "Sea Lion" in Taiwan and was originally the Tench-class Cutlass (SS478). The Hai Pao (Sea Leopard) is actually a Balao-class submarine and was originally the USS Tusk (SS426). Both of these boats are currently in the "active" navy of Taiwan and were both US submarines. Neither of them was the USS Sea Leopard. They also have a boat they call the Hai Lung (Sea Dragon) and the Hai Fu (Sea Tiger). Both of these boats were built by the Netherlands RSV shipyard and belong to the Zwaardvis class of submarine. Another "clue" from the previous page was that it said it was "built in Philadelphia." Any Sea Leopard crewmember knows that the Sea Leopard was built in the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, not Philadelphia.

So, what have we learned here? We have learned not to take what the Washington Post says too literally because although it seems to be correct, it sure as heck was misleading to a lot of Sea Leopard sailors. What have we NOT learned here? We still haven't told you what happened to the USS Sea Leopard, aka S. Bahia, still sitting at that pier in Santa Catarina.

Well, according to <http://www.subnet.com/fleet/ss483.htm>, which keeps track of such matters: "Last known reports are she is out of commission and scrapped in 1998 after having been operated unsuccessfully as a museum."

So that's the story, Larry. After all these hopes of making a trip to Santa Catarina to see the old girl, and all those other dreams of thinking she's fighting on in Taiwan like David against the China Goliath, it ends up that she met with the same fate as the USS Sirago (SS485) when she was turned into razor blades.

As sad as it is, there is always a bright side. Some people cry when they see an old rusty hulk, realizing how beautiful she was in the good old days—you'll never have to face that. And, speaking of "face," maybe sometime when you are shaving in the morning and thinking about the good old submarine days, I want you to consider that those whiskers might be coming clean because of the selfless sacrifice of the USS Sea Leopard or USS Sirago, the Tench-class Smoke-Boat Sisters of SUBRON 6. 😊



Sirago 1945



Sea Leopard - 1970