

The After Battery Rat

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Hogan's Alley

Remember "The Alley"? On Requin, it was six racks in the after battery - outboard - aft of the well manhole. Home of the most senior, most worthless non rated wild men on the boat. The nest where every hair brain prank, underhanded scheme, diabolical plot and stupid idea germinated, hatched and blossomed forth. Yup, you got it - the Varmint Pit.

The ringleader of this band of unrepentant idiots was known as the Mayor of the Alley. The motto was: "If you ain't heard a good rumor in four hours... Start one." In the annals of Naval history, Hogan's Alley ranks right up there with pirate dens and the foc'sle of the HMS Bounty. A rat hole whose only redeeming feature lay in the fact that the wardroom always knew where the 'usual suspects' were camped out and could be rounded up. On Requin, it was known to anyone above Ensign as the 'Headache Factory'.

To say the Alley was an untamed dump would be a master stroke of understatement. If they had not invented Aqua Velva, we couldn't have stood ourselves. After more than two weeks of no showers... You know, the point where you could throw your socks at the goat locker curtains and they would stick. If it wasn't for Aqua Velva and Lucky Tiger hair tonic, we would have been overcome by the smell.

No human beings should live like we did. I have no idea what the size of the accommodations were that they gave Jeffrey Dahmer, but you can bet your fanny it was a helluva lot more than we had in the Alley. It was so small the gahdam roaches stood four on and eight off.

You could get anything in the Alley. The Alley was the control point for contraband, a stash of sea store smokes that never ran dry, a library of pornographic and well-worn cowboy paperbacks that the Library of Congress envied, and an award winning reel of Road Runner cartoons stolen from 16mm sea print films and spliced together into a two hour display of spectacular stupidity. The 'After Battery Road Runner Extravaganza' was, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the best kept secret of the entire Cold War. Over several years, dozens of non-rated members of our submersible forces afloat participated in a project to surgically remove all visual evidence of Mr. Beep Beep and Mr. Coyote from as many sea flicks as came aboard and assemble them into what became known as the 'Big Mother'. You could run a full charge on both batteries in less time than it took to run the Big Mother.

The only rule was the OD must be fully copped out before Big Mother could leave her secure perch in the after battery ventilation lines. Death would have been one of the lesser penalties that would have been paid by any sonuvabitch revealing the existence of Big Mother... The Alley Mafia was the all-knowing, all powerful enforcer of the highly regarded legal system, known as the 'Code of no Crow'. Anyone who crossed that invisible division point and entered the Kingdom of the Crow, became instantly socially unacceptable, forfeited his right of association and was evicted from all of the side lockers and other real property he had managed to homestead, wheedle or otherwise occupy in the land of nonsense and rarely condoned activity. To divulge the details of anything going on in the Alley was an invitation to have the major element of one's manhood promptly nailed to a line locker lid.

I don't want to convey the impression it was 'Eat or be Eaten' in the Alley... Far from it. The Alley was a benevolent society formed for the self-protection of the lowest forms of submarine life... The Cub Scout den for the kids from the other side of the tracks... Like a leper colony where you went to commiserate with your fellow lepers and fantasize about Chief Petty Officers being eaten by sea life

with big teeth.

We took care of our own. I was once in Portsmouth Naval Hospital following the removal of my appendix... Three inmates of the Alley made it past 30 ferret-eyed nurses, carrying a beautiful vase of daffodils resting nicely in two quarts of draft beer. We called them shipmates, one of the most honored and dearly earned terms in the English language. I would draw my last dime out of the bank to buy an airline ticket to go pump a pint of blood for any sonuvabitch who ever called me 'shipmate'. All you fellow bubbleheads really understand what I mean.

I remember one night, we pulled in from God knows where... Doing ping time for Navy pilots who dropped PDCs (practice depth charges) on us and made sleeping damn near impossible.

It was late when we secured the boat and the married guys got stand-bys out of all the single guys... Another day in Paradise.

After the charge, the OD had a cup of coffee, bid us a pleasant evening and turned in for the night.

"Gentlemen, the OD has just planted the idea that we have a pleasant evening..."

We then decided our idea of a pleasant evening called for pooled resources and cold beer next to the screw guards. We were simple people who enjoyed simple pleasures... On E-3 pay, the simpler the cheaper.

We pooled resources, turned over the pilfered dog-eared community controlled liberty card and sent the guy who lost the coin flip, for beer.

In Norfolk, there was a locally brewed product known as 'Banner Beer'. It came in short brown bottles or cans, with a label showing a waving blue pennant with 'Banner Beer' in big white letters. The label went on to say that Banner Beer was a "Masterful representation of the Brewer's Art". What Banner actually was, was living proof that man had mastered the art of bottling fermented sheep dip and selling it for a dollar thirty a six pack.

The beer arrived... We had combed our lockers for floating change resulting in enough for 3 six packs. We knew the drill... Drag a CO2 extinguisher topside to cool the cans... Put the loose cans in a weighted laundry bag that could be deep sixed if the duty OD woke up in the middle of a Rita Hayworth dream and decided to have a smoke topside. Experience indicated that our wardroom contained no commissioned personnel so bent on ass chewing opportunities that they would scuba dive for evidence. We never considered the question that would be posed by six shirtless men congregated around an obviously recently discharged fire extinguisher.

There we were, the Navy's finest... Sucking suds with a million stars overhead. Some animal speaks, "Gentlemen, I give you a beautiful night..." Beautiful night Hell, maybe an acceptable moment. My idea of a 'beautiful night' ain't got nothin' to do with drinking cheap beer, with a bunch of ugly bastards, at a time of night when the only people running around are burglars and whores.

That was the closest we ever got to. "I love you guys..." But it speaks volumes for the lads who rode boats and lived the legend of the final days of the diesel boat Navy.

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