

The After Battery Rat

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The Granby Street Bus

You would have to have been a SUBRON SIX non rated bottom feeder to connect with memories of 'The Granby Street' bus.

It was the public conveyance that connected the main Norfolk naval base to the infamous 'East Main Street.' East Main was the North American Mecca of commercial sin and carnal delight. Anything so depraved and terrible that it couldn't be found on East Main, was practiced in maximum-security prisons by guys tethered with logging chains doing twenty years to life. The Devil was the majority partner in everything that went on, on East Main.

For a lot of fresh out of boot camp eighteen year-old kids, it was the first place beyond the backseat of a 1947 Chevrolet that they had seen a bare set of female tits. East Main was the 'pass go' of many naval careers. Let's say it was educational.

At eighteen, I increased my education. Me'n an Electrician striker shelled out three bucks apiece to see a barmaid perform an absolute miracle, after hours in a backroom on East Main. We were not alone... Musta been an additional 25 destroyer sailors in there.

The bartender placed a silver dollar and balanced it up on the top of a Rolling Rock bottle. This red head who was built when meat was cheap, using only anatomical dexterity picked the coin up and dropped it in a beer mug held by the bartender. The cheering by the members of the Second Fleet lasted three minutes. It was part of a lad's education that could only be obtained on East Main... Nothing like that ever turned up on '*Watch Mr. Wizard*', '*The Sealtest Big Top*' or '*Ed Sullivan*.'

Every surface you could plant your butt on around East Main would make the seat of a set of undress whites look like you slid down a coal-loading chute.

The only time you saw an officer on East Main was when a bluejacket riot reached 'out of hand' proportions of a South American government overthrow or the point where firearms were being discharged and the combatants started bringing in horses and catapults.

The Granby Street bus provided salvation and escape from unscheduled riots, mayhem and debauchery.

That particular bus hauled domestics, short order cooks, hotel bus boys, bell boys, barmaids and the lower elements of the naval manpower totem pole.

The Municipal Transit Authority used to use rolling stock that had maybe six months life left before heading to their location of eternal rust collapse. They looked like they had once hauled livestock in their career.

There were no protective shelters for passenger protection from the elements. On rainy days in winter, when every bluejacket on the East Coast was wearing wool dress canvas, standing in the rain while waiting on the bus made sailors smell like the inside of a sheep dip tank.

A sopping wet peacoat becomes a lead kimono in ten minutes... In fifteen minutes, you have to tape railroad rails to your legs to keep from shattering your shins.

Ten to fifteen sailors getting on a bus with sopping wet peacoats can warp the bus frame.

These are facts known only to E-3s and below.

In those days they had bus advertising. You could look at the Double Mint Twins, have Smokey The Bear point out that 'Only you can prevent forest fires' and have every goddam bank in the Tidewater area fill you in on their latest passbook savings rate. Personally, making \$34.00 every two weeks plus sub, sea & foreign duty pay, we weren't great passbook saving prospects.

The Granby Street bus was a kind of modern day Noah's Ark. It contained lots of weird animals that regularly went to sea.

It wasn't a great place to strike up a conversation with local girls. Every girl living in Norfolk had been taught from infancy that every guy in the Second Fleet spent a major part of his day plotting to 'get in her panties.' Aside from being an extremely accurate portrayal of unmarried enlisted bluejacket intent, this brought a lot of casual romance to 'All stop, answering bells on fantasy wishing.'

But ogling women was OK... It was also cheap and available. At nineteen, we weren't that far away from the age and maturity of high school grads and Norfolk had high school females.

Making a run on some teenage darling in Norfolk had certain built in risks.

1. Her old man might be a four striper who could have you completing an enlistment jackassing fuel hoses at a Labrador seaplane base
2. She could have tits like Jane Mansfield... Look like the Goddess of Reckless Abandonment and be thirteen years old. (Her uncle could be a retired COB and own a large caliber handgun.)
3. She could turn out to be a transvestite machinist mate. (You didn't have to worry about AIDS, herpes or gay marriage... God hadn't invented any of that back then.)

"Pardon me, Miss do you know where I could find a good art museum? How'bout an orchid show? How'bout a cheap motel where we could relax and spend a couple hours in horizontal contemplation of the meaning of life?"

This was also in the days before they stopped people from eating on public transportation.

"Hey Stuke... I can't eat all of this... You wanta go halfers on this meatball sub?"

All it took was one heavy application of spongy airbrakes to put meatball sub sauce all down the front of a fresh set of whites. Meatball sub sauce, pizza grease, purple snow cone stains seem to always be noticed by senior naval personnel... You discovered that early in your E-3 career.

A lot of old women hauling shopping bags containing what may have been an anvil collection and wearing those old Dr. Scholl's 'granny shoes', rode the bus. They were about the only females in Norfolk who would talk to sailors on a bus... Or anywhere else, for that matter.

When I arrived in Norfolk in '59, the signs on the front of the buses read 'CE Piers'. What became 'D&S Piers' was then the 'Convoy Escort Piers'... 'D&S' denoted 'Destroyer & Submarine Piers'... That's a little known fact left out of most modern day history books.

To many of us at the anchor end of our submarine careers in SUBRON SIX, the Granby Street bus represented the only mobility we had and substantially increased the range of our geographic accessibility. It was a place where there were no officers... A place where you knew damn well you wouldn't run into the Chief of Boat, the Force Commander or Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip.

It was a magic steel box that hauled you through neighborhood decorated for the holidays or where you could see good-looking women out mowing their lawns or trimming hedges in shorts and halter tops, depending on the season.

At nineteen, broke as hell and at loose ends, that was just about as good as it got.