

The After Battery Rat

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Stand by for Heavy Rolls

I was on the extreme end... the receiving end of all decisions made in regard to boat operation. I have no idea how the skipper decided it was time to 'change course'. At times, I figured that he made the decision to alter course in tandem consultation with the Devil. Just the captain and Satan sitting around in the wardroom cooking up stuff to add to the wonder and amazement of everyday life on a wornout smokeboat.

Any 1MC announcement that began with...

"Stand by for heavy rolls, secure all gear adrift... I repeat... stand by for heavy rolls," told you that shortly you and anything not firmly anchored to something welded to the pressure hull would be bouncing around like buckshot in a rolling beer barrel.

Hogan's Alley was just aft of the middle of the boat. Sleeping in the Alley during heavy swell sea gyration was like being a package on a shelf in a post office located halfway down the intestinal track of a bucking bronco.

People... grown human beings flew around like silk panties in the rinse cycle.

Crap you hadn't seen in months flew out of the overhead lines... Long lost cigarette lighters, classic out-of-print skin books... Pictures of a girlfriend of some guy who went nuke two years ago... Old love letters... "Nobody knew who owned 'em" harmonicas... Geedunk truck menus and price lists dating back to two years before you enlisted. All kinds of weird stuff appeared.

You think a Zippo lighter is harmless? Get hit just above the eye with one traveling at two miles an hour below the speed of light. Take a GP (general purpose) boot in the ear. I once caught the hardback Book of The Month Edition of Harold Robbins' Carpetbaggers in the teeth. It cut my lips all to Hell and made me look like Zippy the Clown for two weeks.

A flying sea print canister with three 16 mm movie reels in it could get you a full medical discharge... Or put you in a coma for so long, your civvies would go out of style.

All fleetboats carried a vicious contraption called a 'doubler plate', a device invented for the specific purpose of killing off surplus E-3s.

The fool thing closely resembled a Norfolk & Western locomotive drive wheel. When some idiot forgot to lash the damn thing down and it got to flying around in rough seas, it could be lethal.

It was like everyone in the After Battery was engaged in 'cut you off at the ankles' tank turret hockey.

Doubler plates were pressure hull reinforcing flanges that bolted to the bottom of boat entry points so that in the event that the hatch above was damaged, watertight integrity would be maintained.

In E-3 talk, that means if some bastard shoots something at you that shears off your access hatch, you probably won't know about it until the messcooks come aft for spuds. Spuds? Yep... Cooks fill the void between the topside access hatch and the hull reinforcing doubler plate with bags of potatoes. After several weeks the entire void is filled with bags of potatoes and close to 200 miles of potatoes roots.

If you loosen the manhole plate in the center of the doubler plate and there is a rush of air followed by visiting saltwater, something 'not good' has happened to the door leading to the roof of your seagoing house.

You won't find this in any publication obtainable from the U.S. Naval Institute because their books are written by scholarly individuals, professors and very responsible commissioned personnel... Not jaybird After Battery Rats who rig doubler plates and jackass potatoes to the cooks.

Speaking of cooks... In heavy swells when the boat is jumping all over the place, the cooks serve 'roll yer own' baloney sandwiches with the green fur around the edge... and that old standard truck tire patch cheese and that self-vulcanizing 'comes in a green can' mayonnaise. If the storm tossed you around for a couple of days, you could die of green baloney, neoprene cheese poisoning.

Moving fore and aft in heavy rolls required Fred Astair agility... I've seen footwork that would make Gene Kelly cry.

The worst place on the boat to negotiate when the boat was doing the up, down, side to side, North Atlantic doo-dah, was stepping through the watertight door between the After Battery and Control Room. Right through that bank vault-type door, on the starboard side was the python gang-bang... the ten pound list control blower with more tubes, pipes and attachments than a major cathedral organ.

And beyond that was this industrial size Hindu torture rack, known as the air manifold.

The gahdam air manifold was a bloody man-eater... It was a mechanical jungle of bone crushing valve stems, hammer valve handles, sentinal valves, reducers, gauges and connecting piping. The Navy covered it up, but every year thirty to forty submariners were crucified on those sonuvabitches.

You don't believe me? Go to any cemetery near an operating sub base and you will see "Death by Impalement on Air Manifold" on a lot of old pre-nuke headstones.

Submarines were designed so that officers didn't have to pass the air manifold in heavy weather. They ate forward, slept forward, showered, used the head forward... They only ventured aft, past the Hindu Bone Crusher, to stem crew riots involving horses and small arms fire, to steal our *Super Sugar Crisp*, *Grape Nuts* and *Frosted Flakes*, get involved in major pre-advertised skin book swaps and give extremely boring practical factor lectures on subjects like the care and cleaning of the 45 caliber pistol, foot fungus prevention and various illnesses carried by foreign speaking female personal pleasure marketing specialists.

At the Naval Academy, they taught all of our diving officers that ladies from certain locations in South and Central America could sell you stuff that could make certain extremely important anatomical appendages, turn black and fall off. You learned stuff like this at practical factor lectures. The corpsman would always chirp in with...

"Mr. So-In-So, isn't lying... That stuff will make you sterile, blind and require a plastic peter."

Riding ships in stormy seas is one of the main common experiences that form the inner soul of the true sailor.

Storms at sea put you directly in touch with the true magnificence of the Creator. God does some of his most spectacular work with raging black saltwater.

Modern boatsailors riding their big black saltwater subways transiting the undisturbed depths of the world's oceans miss most of that. They miss the fun of busting your ass with water smashing up and over your bow... The yaw, pitch and roll of a round-bottomed fleet boat.

"Stand by for heavy rolls... Secure all gear adrift. I repeat, stand by for heavy rolls..."

And we did.