

The After Battery Rat

Volume 3, Issue 1 – Insert. By Dex Armstrong with Permission

February 2002

Things They Don't Tell You at New London

In high school, I watched a TV program called Silent Service. An old retired codger named Rear Admiral Thomas M. Dykers opened the show with, "Tonight, we bring you another thrilling episode of Silent Service stories, of warfare under the sea." I did not know that for the first time, I was being radiated by minute television transmitted bull manure particles, that I would come to know as 'sea stories'. Silent Service sold BS by the yard, beginning with the words, "Thrilling adventure..."

There were things they didn't tell you. Things like being the guy who threw trash over the side in heavy seas... Rigging doubler plates in a rolling boat... Reversing the blank flanges in the air lines to the fuel ballast tanks when they were empty, and you lined them up as main ballast tanks... And several other thrilling adventures that the devil and the USN combined talents to bring you.

Lets begin with rigging blank flanges for main ballast tank use. (For you boat sailors; 'blank flange', alias 'spectacle flange' alias 'dutchman plates')... For those of you not initiated in the smoke boat fraternity, imagine a dental procedure where you had to remove a wildcat's molars through his rectum while inside a washing machine in the rinse cycle.

A spectacle flange was a half-inch thick piece of metal that looked like a mask for a 'Blind in one eye Lone Ranger'. On one side, it had a hole ringed by stud holes - The other side was solid with a ring of stud holes. They were in all fuel ballast tank lines (600# MBT blow).

When the fuel in a tank was used up and the tank was filled with compensating sea water, the hand of the Almighty would descend on some undeserving E-3 bastards... Always two... Fun must be shared. They gave you each box wrenches and words of

Dex Armstrong's Writings

3rd in a Series of Demented Writings from DEX

From the Surgeon General:

This is the 3rd contribution we've had from Dex Armstrong, aka the "After Battery Rat". As stated to you before, if you find these works "offensive" then you have every opportunity to write to me (see return address on newsletter) or email me (RMBICKEL@STUPP.COM) or even call me (636) 225-7528 and let me know you'd rather me do a "Dex-Ectomy" on your newsletter. Just for your information, we currently have a mailing list of about 640 crew members and honoraries and of that number, only 8 people (as of this writing) have asked for the Dex-Ectomy. I have received a ton of mail from crew members who tell me to keep going with Dex because it makes them laugh and helps them to remember the way things "really" were aboard the Sirago.

Let me also tell you that "Dex" himself is an honorary crew member of the Sirago because of his contributions AND he has GENEROUSLY contributed to our Booster fund which keeps this newsletter going. "Thanks Dex!" –Mike



encouragement, "Go get em', bucko!" "Have a good time, sweetheart..." "Don't be out too late dearest, you know how daddy and I worry about you..."

You always politely responded with an all inclusive "Screw you and the horses you rode in on."

They gave you things like dog chains... A thick window washer's belt with 15 feet of heavy chain attached. At the end, there was a clamp called 'the dog'. The dog connected with a T-track that snaked its way down the full length of the topside deck. The purpose of the device was to keep a man from being washed overboard and

out to sea. Any baboon with six in-line brain cells could take a look at the length of chain and recognize immediately that when the overwhelming swell hit you, the chain would position you between the limber holes and the tank tops, where you would enjoy the sensation of being repeatedly smacked with a coal shovel.

To move up and down the deck at sea, you had to grab the chain and pull the clamp along the track. This was known as 'Walking the dog'... 'Strolling with Fido'... 'Taking Spike for a walk'... etc. If you were E-3 or below, these terms held no humor. E-4 and up, they were sidesplitting gut busters.

Once you had your box wrenches and dog chain, they cracked the after battery hatch and opened it (If the engines were running and it was cold topside, the compartment below became an arctic cyclone with grown men yelling "Put the iron back in the pneumonia hole!").

It was always wet when you dragged your dog back to the superstructure access lid... You stayed clear of the exhaust lines if steam was coming off them. Contact with a hot exhaust was one of those once in a lifetime experiences where you learned everything you ever wanted to know in a fraction of a second.

From then on, it was simple. While operating in a space a little larger than an Oldsmobile glove box, you and the poor sonuvabitch you were paired up with had to pull the ring of stud bolts, put the nuts and bolts in a coffee can that you zipped up in your jacket, reverse the flange to the open or 'Lone Ranger SeeingEye' position, then replace the stud bolts. After this, you repeated the whole fun and games procedure on the opposite 600# MBT blow line. While you were down in the devil's crawlspace, large portions of the Atlantic Ocean were sloshing in and out of the limber holes and raining down on you from the free flooding deck above... This was about the most thrilling it got... Other than unscheduled major leaks.

Then, there were doubler plates. I never liked the whole concept of doubler plates... You only put the damn things up when your fellow 'above the surface' Navy brother were going to shoot or drop something on you that might possibly enter your place of residence, or poke some kind of unwelcome hole in it. Even as E-3s, we instinctively knew that this kind of activity had originally germinated from a bad idea.

For those of you who have been fortunate enough to have never been next to a doubler plate... Imagine the first cousin of a railroad locomotive wheel... Now imagine the Three Stooges trying to fasten this contraption to the inside of a rotating cement mixer. There, you have it... Fun and games in the Silent Service... And the service became rapidly unsilent if you ever dropped one of those sonuvabitches on any of the five appendages living in your boot.

Another thing, no one at New London ever mentioned the inboard vent for #2 sanitary tank in relation to non-qual sleeping arrangements.

They also failed to mention the vertical spud lockers that masqueraded as showers on diesel boats.

No one told us that failure to secure one little gate valve and one little kick throw could actually reverse-percolate previously digested Navy chow through your morning coffee.

They conveniently left out the fact that anything that came from Fleet Supply or the forward hold on Orion, came with free roaches.

Nobody said anything about bug juice and panther piss.

And worst of all, no one mentioned that Chief Petty Officers couldn't take a joke.