

The After Battery Rat

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Standing Lookout

At times, there is no job in the entire world better than standing lookout on a diesel boat. Well, maybe it's number two behind being a professional beach comber on a little known Pacific island paradise where the female inhabitants all have perky boobs and run around buck nekkit. Unfortunately the latter never showed up on Requin's Watch, Quarter and Station Bill.

Adriane Stuke and I were professional lookouts. We both held Doctor of Relative Bearing degrees... With extensive postgraduate work in floating debris... Crap in the water... Oil slick identification and 'What'n th'hell is that shit?' identification.

The only qualifications you needed to apprentice for the lookout position were (A) A pair of eyes, (B) The ability to drink liquid synthetic lizard dooky that the night cook passed off as coffee, (C) A 55gal., self-venting bladder assembly, (D) A minimal understanding of the '360 degrees in a circle' concept, (E) The ability to put up with boring conversation for hours at a time, and (F) Personal plumbing fixtures big enough to locate in cold weather and that could extend farther than skivvies, dungarees and two pair of foul weather pants... The latter being by far the most important qualification.

Your office... The location where you conducted business was a hole in the sail. The Requin had one of those high fiberglass sails... The ones with an O-2 level... Like Grampus and Cutlass (and Sirago).

Speaking of the O-2 level, there was a small chart table located there. That table witnessed more high-speed sexual cohabitation than any place on earth, short of Clinton's Oval Office... Most boy-girl connections took place in less time than it took to develop a Polaroid print. With foreplay limited to, "What's your name, sweetheart?" that chart table felt, at an absolute minimum of, ten bare fannies a night in port. The sprinkling of inter-gender pixie dust back and forth was a favorite extra-curricula activity on the 481... Not necessarily limited to either the silver dolphin society or the forward battery goldfish club.

In wintertime, being a lookout was beyond any doubt, the most miserable, thankless, wet, cold, and never-ending job in the armed forces. I have never been so gahdam cold in my entire life... At times, your heart actually pumped ice slush through your veins.

When you are cold, miserable, laminated in more clothing than Tutankhamen... With a watch cap pulled down over your eyes, wearing mitts the size of boxing gloves... Staring through 50 yr. old binoculars with lens scratches that look like ice skaters school figures... It's

Contribution from Dex

From Joe Roche:

Since the "theme" of this newsletter is standing lookout watch, this article from the "After Battery Rat" himself is submitted. Instead of the usual cartoon "Rat" image, this coffee cup is submitted to get those "lookout" memories started.

Joe



a damn wonder we didn't hit something. There were times I was so damn cold that I actually envied Joan of Arc. If you have never taken a leak in sub-zero weather, in the sail of a pitching diesel boat, you have missed one of the all time defining moments of life... To include the major thrill of a momentary warm feeling as you discover your God-given anatomical configuration will not permit maximum extension beyond multiple layers of clothing, to include three zippers.

And no cigarette with coffee ever tasted better than the one you got in the messdecks after being relieved by some other poor miserable bastard.

I know why the Titanic clipped the berg... The lookouts were cold... They were stamping their feet and rubbing their hands... The 7x50 binoculars were fogged up.

"Hey Jack, why are we up here... We've got radar... Hell, when they invented radar, it should have let us off the hook. See them airplanes flying around? You don't see silly sonuvabitches sitting on each wing looking for stuff... Jeezus, it's cold."

"Bill, take a look... Bows' on... Zero, zero, zero... What's that?"

"Who gives a shit..."

WHOMP!

You didn't have to be exceptionally bright to read running lights, figure the 'angle on the bow,' recognize a steady bearing rate, report 'red over red' (you know, the old "red over red, the captain is dead" thing), read channel buoys and pass contacts to the idiot doing the

same thing you were doing on the other side of the bridge.

There were silly things that lookouts did to new officers... Things like, during night steaming where you just ran to charge batteries then return on station. We used to see the moon make a 360-degree trip around the horizon and knew that the helmsman was giving the new guy a merry-go-round ride. A waste time, complete circle where the helmsman threw a loop in the wake and the new guy missed it.

Another little stupid 'welcome aboard' stunt was to call out,
"I've got a Bee-One-R-Dee... Bearing one seven five... Position angle 15 degrees"
Bee-One-R-Dee... Bird.

Or a 'Bravo-Two-Echo-Romeo casing'... Translation, beer can. Both a highly worn out 'ha ha,' but fun if you could toss the OD in the trick bag.

I can remember balmy summer nights, light breezes... Full moon with reflection running all the way to the horizon... Boat running 'full on four' slicing along at twenty plus knots... Bottle nose dolphins leaping around in the bow wave... Leaving phosphorescent tracks... Water rising up the tank tops, slamming through the limber holes then falling away aft... Diesel exhaust drifting over the screw guards to disappear in wake spray and the night... The luminescent glow of the stern light marking our passing... At times you can see the trailing edge of the flag aft of the sail and when you can't see it, you hear it snapping in the wind. At times you can pick out the wing lights of aircraft heading to and from Europe. Once in a while, you get merchant surface contacts. Port and starboard lookouts speculate on what that tanker crew had for evening chow earlier and how much the sonuvabitches are making a month.

On rare occasions, you get a seagoing ocean liner. Skipper radios captain of the liner and tells him of our presence... Tells him we are a US submarine... Asks him if he holds us on radar and can identify our lights. Both skippers agree that if passengers see surfaced submarine, we will become an attractive curiosity drawing too many folks to the rail... We darken ship... Turn off running and navigation lights.

There we are laying to in the dark... Beautiful ship passes... People doing triple flip-flops into the pool... Women in dresses dancing with guys in their civvies class "A"s... Band music drifts across the water.

"Hey Stuke..."

"Yeah Dex..."

"You know what I want to do someday?"

"No telling..."

"I want to ride one of those big sonuvabitches... Have some pink-nippled blonde fluff up my pillow, scratch my back and sing me to sleep... Set my clock for midnight... Get up... Go down to the grand salon for champagne, shrimp and lobster tail... Take in the sights of nude swimming hour... Make a couple of bets at the O-3 level dog track... Catch a massage and sauna... Call the 'Send me something soft and blonde to sleep with' steward and hit the rack."

"Armstrong..."

"Yeah?"

"You on dope?"

"Nah... Just dreaming in Cinemascope. The price is the same... Might as well go wide screen."

"Why don't you guys knock off the horsecrap... One of you drop down and rig out the running lights."

Coffee always tasted best on the bridge. You had to be good to climb the ladder in those high bridge fiberglass sails with three or four cups of hot coffee balanced between your left arm and your chest... If you never did it, you have no idea what I just said. If you did, you have the complete picture.

In SUBRON SIX, we used the old white Pyrex cups. When you finished your coffee, you put the empty cup in the void behind the radar mast. When the watch was over, each guy put a couple in his foul weather jacket pockets and took them down. If they called up with,

"Bridge... Conn. How many men on the bridge?"

You knew what was coming next, so you grabbed the damn things and tossed 'em over the side. The CO didn't want to dive the boat with half a dozen Pyrex cups doin' the mambo in his fiberglass sail and he didn't want a lookout to fill his foul weather jacket with the fool things, busting one on the way down and arriving in the conn with a three inch Pyrex shard sticking in a lung.

I'm going to laugh like hell if they display artifacts removed from the Titanic and five or six white Pyrex cups turn up... There's gotta be a few thousand of the damn things roaming around on the floor of the North Atlantic.

I'm proud of my 'years in the shears'... Met a lot of fine people and saw a lot of interesting stuff. I'm sure nukes have robot video cameras... Satellite observation or some kind of electronic Seeing Eye Dog device. Damn shame... It was those experiences that casehardened your balls.

Dex