

The After Battery Rat

Volume 2, Issue 4 – Insert. By Dex Armstrong with Permission

November 2001

Heavy Weather

Did you see "Das Boot" (The Boat)? Kraut U-boat flick... Great. If you haven't seen it and you rode smoke boats, do yourself a favor and rent the video.

In the movie, there is a scene where the boat closes with another U-boat in the North Atlantic. There is one helluva sea running and the lads on the bridge are wearing rain gear.

I got a little nostalgic... I loved heavy weather. I loved bouncing around in a butt-buster storm. I was blessed in that I never got seasick. I loved storms... You remember the kind with flat rain? Rain that was wind carried, came in dime-size drops and came in flat? Wicked stuff.

No one could invent an amusement park ride like heavy weather in the North Atlantic with 40 ft. seas running. Gray overhead, and wind drifted foam smacking hell out of you. If you could mate a roller coaster, a bucking bronco and a drunken marimba band, you might get close.

As I said, God blessed me in that I never got seasick. A lot of good men did... And did their job in spite of it. They are the ones who deserve admiration. I was an idiot who loved the 'rock n' roll' on the bridge. Loved to see the bow disappear, have green water smash up against the sail, then see the bullnose come slicing up through the swell. Loved it. Like sex on a mechanical bull... Not that I ever engaged in that, but I have a wide angle imagination (Someone said that RamJet not only had done that, but did it with a mechanical paint mixer in each hip pocket).

"Roll you sonuvabitch, roll!"

"Pitch you sonuvabitch, pitch!"

Never failed. For some reason, the damn boat took a weird roll every time I passed the air manifold, and I hit it... Or it hit me in the right rib cage... All those raw valve stems, hammer valve handles and reducer bonnets - sort of a vertical Hindu torture rack. It owned me.

I don't want to enter the "National Clumsy

Dex Armstrong's Writings

2nd in a Series of Demented Writings from DEX

From the Surgeon General:

This is the 2nd 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. They are inserted for the sole purpose of taking you back to those old salty, crusty, rusty, pirate-like days aboard the USS Sirago.

Dex was never aboard the Sirago but served aboard the USS Requin and was very familiar with Pier 22 in Norfolk. His time period is the late 50's, early 60's.

In this story, Dex mentions a fellow named "Stuke". This was his soul mate – his partner in crime. Many of the E-3s out there will relate to his style of writing. –Mike



Sonuvabitch Championships," but then again, nobody ever requested that I attend a command performance audition for the National Ballet. In heavy weather, I bounced around like a ping pong ball in a tambourine.

I would start up a ladder on an uproll, then the bottom would drop out and I would fly up like I was shot out of a cannon, and played the last ten ladder rungs like a xylophone, with my kneecaps.

I slept in the middle after rack next to the hull, outboard in the alley. The medic had a CRES sheet metal locker at the end of the passageway. If you bunked in the alley and were in your rack at sick call, you got treated to masterfully crafted bullshit explanations for injury, personally sensitive maladies, and hitchhiking critter populations. Over

the years, I heard Pulitzer Prize contending stuff. I heard grown men tell things that only a mother and the most gullible sonuvabitch on the planet would believe. One fellow explained that a pineapple fell out of a pineapple tree and split his nose and lip. Doc explained that pineapples grow on the ground... "Oh hell Doc, Make it a watermelon tree and put some kind of Band Aid on it."

I get off the subject easily... As I was saying, I slept in the rack next to Doc's magical medical locker. The shelves in Doc's box were held in with pop rivets... The flat side of one rivet was boogered up and had a sharp edge. Once while I was racked out, dead to the world, the boat was rolling in heavy seas... My head would roll over next to the medical locker and the jagged pop rivet would etch little scratch tracks on my face. When they woke me up to go on watch, I looked like a Zamboanga bush man. My face looked like I had been in a sword fight and everybody had a sword but me. It took two months to get over that one... And the pop rivet got smacked flat and taped over.

Everyone stored junk in the overhead vent lines... Especially sea print film cases. When you started taking heavy rolls, all sorts of crap fell out of the overhead. If you want to duplicate the sensation of getting hit with a three reel 16mm. sea print film can, lay flat on the kitchen floor and have your wife stand on a kitchen stool and drop a bowling ball on your nose... That would be a close simulation.

In heavy weather, the cooks made 'Pick it up and carry it with you' chow... The best were meatloaf sandwiches. You could cram a couple in the pockets of your foul weather jacket along with a banana, and pick up a lidded cup of coffee. Life was good.

One night I was on the stern planes... Adrian Stuke had the bow planes. We were snorkeling at 65 ft. in heavy seas. We brought it up to 60 ft. because the head valve kept cycling, driving everyone nuts, and putting a helluva lot of water in the forward engine room (After the Cutlass passed a hundred feet once with the diving officer continuing to push the electrode bypass... We usually elected to show more snork. In heavy seas, the rising and falling swells gave enough sea returns to hide a gahdam totem pole). There we were, bouncing around in 60 ft. of surface turbulence, running the needles in the shallow gauges five and five... Adrian had the stern planes and as usual, was singing a Ray Charles song... "I'm Busted"... We were pitching around and roller coasting all over hell and half Georgia, when someone trying to make his way aft, bounced into something over near the I. C. board and everything went black. Black inside a submarine is definitely dark. I don't think it gets any darker than that. My old' man used to say, "It was darker than the inside of a well digger's wallet." It was at least that dark. Anyone who isn't a gahdam liar, will tell you he had a puckered vent. In that split second where everyone is fumbling around trying to locate the switches on the battle lanterns, Adrian yells,

"MAMA, IT'S A MIRACLE!! I'VE BECOME RAY CHARLES!!!"

Then we regained lighting and we were still laughing. Things never got so tough that Adrian Stuke couldn't make you smile. He has been my shipmate for 40 years... And married an absolute knockout of a gal. Janie is as lovely inside as she is outside. Why she puts up with the most untamed wildman on the planet only God and Janie know... Love 'em both.

Eating was always a hoot in foul weather with heavy seas running. Officers had fiddle boards, wooden table covers with holes cut out for their dishes. As the boat rolled, the dishes stayed on the table (not the same could always be said for the contents). The animals had red rubber mats. You know, 'hot water bottle' red rubber... On a good roll, you could still wind up wearing most of your meal.

I used to relieve guys who weren't that comfortable spending a couple of hours at the end of a dog chain in the shears. Loved the magnificence of that spectacle. Nobody can watch that display of natural forces and go below failing to believe in some kind of supreme power. You don't have to be real religious to know you've been close to something. And if you were very lucky, when you dropped into the control room sopping wet and tried to unsnap your gear with half frozen prune fingers, the old man would look up from the chart table, finger his old burnt up pipe and say,

"Dex, tell Doc to break out brandy for the bridge watch."

There's nothing like a cup of 'bottom of the pot' coffee, a little brandy, the pounding of Fairbanks engines, and watching the steam coming off your socks draped over the engine cover. ♦