

THE AFTER BATTERY RAT



Dex Armstrong

FOREWARD

Bob 'Dex' Armstrong served on the USS Requin SS-481 and USS Diablo SS 479 in the 1960s. He was and is the consummate submariner equivalent of a Will Rogers.

Contained in this book are a compilation of Dex's colorful observations, drawings, descriptions of events, people he knew who influenced and shaped the rest of his life during his time spent in the Navy on and around submarines. These stories are presented as he wrote them and are in no particular timeline sequence. Sadly, Dex cast off his lines and went on eternal patrol July 8, 2014 and joined his lovely wife Solveig in Arlington National Cemetery.



Robert Dexter Armstrong

Dex Armstrong made his final dive on 8 July 2014, but his words from the goat locker remain to ensure that we who read them do so perfectly confident that we are not left alone when that time comes for us.

Read Dex's inspiring words and let them guide you from here on in.

**When your final dive is made, and your battery's running low,
You'll know there lies a boat for you many fathoms here below.**

**With your annunciators jammed on full and your depth gauge needles bent,
our accumulator's dry of oil and your air banks all are spent,**

**It's then you get to wonderin', 'Is my life's boat rigged for dive?'
Your guessing drill commences, 'Am I dead or still alive?'**

**You pace the flooded decks with scorn and curse the flaws of man.
Into realms of Rex you've stepped, and here you'll make your stand,**

**To live your life, as sailors must, at the bottom of the sea.
There's one you'll have to reckon - - that one, my friend, is Thee.**

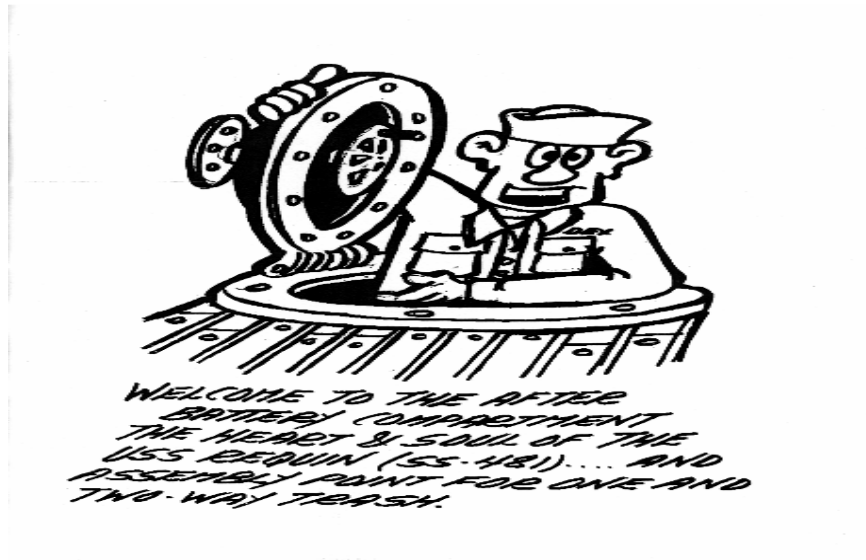
**Will your conscience do you justice when the final muster's in?
Did you lead the kind of life you should in every port you've been?**

**The answers to these questions and many, many more are locked in
the hearts of sailors from Cannes to Singapore.**

**So, when your day for mast rolls 'round, the choice is up to you.
Sailor, chart your course of life right now. Chart it straight and true.**

**Now's the time to flood your tanks and trim up fore and aft,
It's a trifle late when the klaxon sounds to square away your craft.**

**Your final billet lies below, on 'Old Ocean's' floor.
So, be ready when that last word's passed. "Sailor, rest your oar!"**



On the diesel powered submarines, the After Battery mess deck was the gathering place, where the crewmembers and watch standers ate their meals, played cards, Acey-Deucey, watched movies, held meetings, solved all the world's problems, or just sat around imparting 'words of wisdom' to the lower-rated riffraff. An after battery rat was usually the one individual who had the greatest gift of gab over all other crew members. Pictured below is part of a crew in the after battery mess enjoying dinner before relieving the watch. Ah, the memories this picture brings back to our minds!



The following is a listing of Dex's stories as written contained in this booklet in the order presented - compiled by: Dan Martini in 2015

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In 1993, someone wanted to put together a story for a newspaper about submarine life on the *Requin* and approached Dex for info. He received the story posted here. As Dex so eloquently put it, "If the going rate for bullshit ever goes to a dime a pound, all diesel boat sailors will become zillionaires!"

Here is the '*Letter to Jason*', as related by Dex:

Recollections Of An After Battery Rat

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Dear Jason,

I have no idea what you are looking for. I was one of the lads who rode *Requin* in the twilight of her career. She was a sweetheart, and those of us who were fortunate enough to be assigned to her and serve under Ed Frothingham were damn lucky. Capt. Frothingham was a very special naval officer, an exceptional leader of men and a sailor's sailor in every sense of the term. He instilled in all of us a sense of duty and pride that we have carried down through all these years. We were 'his boys'... We knew it and it gave us something other lads who served on other boats missed. It was a helluva good feeling to know you had that kind of a commander.

Where do I begin? It was a long time ago... Over thirty years. I was a nineteen year old lad... Green... About as green as they came. In those days, old sub sailors would say,

"Hell kid, I've wrung more saltwater out of my socks than you've seen!" That about says it.

It was 1960 and there I was, standing on Pier 22, Norfolk, in the shadow of 'Mother Onion' (USS Orion AS-18, our tender or mother ship). I had been assigned to T-Division on Orion to await the return of my boat, then deployed in the Med. T-Division was sort of an orphanage for bluejackets in transit. We were billeted in a forward berthing compartment. It was a pig pen. It smelled like an iguana cage. Any lad who spent time waiting for his boat stuck in the squadron's T-Division had a lousy introduction to Submarine Squadron Six.

In those days you weren't allowed to have civilian clothes aboard a naval ship. Outside the gate of Destroyer / Submarine Piers (D&S piers) ran a street called Hampton Boulevard... A sort of neon Baghdad. They had places called locker clubs. You rented a locker and there you stowed your civvies. Hampton Blvd. was lined with locker clubs, naval tailors and bars... Beer joints like Lovey's Crazy Kat...The Victory Grill ... The Big "O" ... Bell's ... Looters' Terrace. We, the lads of SUBRON SIX, hung out at Bell's. The barmaids were Dixie and Tiger. The single guys set up shop in Bell's when the boat was in port. It had a well-worn pool table and a very unique collection of painted ladies who catered to every temptation that an immature lad could ever desire.

It was great to get word that my boat was coming in. I spent a couple of hours wandering around on the pier, watching the Elizabeth River Channel for the Requin. Late in the day, I saw her for the first time. My new home was a three hundred eleven foot beauty. She slid into the outboard nest and put her lines over. Crew members yelled to wives and children. Lads from the tender hustled fresh milk and fruit over the gangway to smiling crew members topside. There was a lot of yelling, wisecracking and activity. I reported aboard and immediately got lost in the shuffle. Nobody gave a damn about some 19 yr. old kid with a sea bag.

The first fellows I met were Larry Dyshart, Rick Katzmyer and the leading seaman, Adriane Stuke. I didn't know it at the time, but 'Stukey' would be one of my two closest mates during the years I rode Requin. Stuke was 100% red blooded American wild man... He worked hard, played hard and attracted good looking women like a magnet. The two of us gave the skipper and wardroom more gray hair than any other two apes in the crew. Our antics became legend. If we had spent more time in productive development and less in monkey business, Ed Frothingham would have slept a helluva lot better. If they had a Phi Beta Kappa for class clowns, Stuke and I would have nailed it down flat. Over the years we got involved in every knot-head prank and foolish stunt that took place on the ship.

Being a submariner is serious business. They make that very clear early on. There is no place on duty for error or a cut-up. You foul up and you're gone... It is that simple. We were good at what we did. Ed Frothingham and Mr. Frame made damn sure we did our jobs. Pride comes from professional performance... The hallmark of the submarine force. Ed Frothingham made us sharp. He wouldn't tolerate a slack crew but he allowed a level of latitude that made us a high morale crew. We pushed him past his limit on several occasions and when we did, he set our hip-pockets on fire. Anyone who ever got in the Old Man's doghouse never forgot it. He could pour molten lava on you in a heartbeat. Some more about the smiles later.

I was originally assigned to messcooking. There was no disciplinary stigma attached to being a messcook... If you were not yet a qualified submarine sailor and you were E-3 or below, you messcooked... It was that simple. Non-rated, non-qualified men were worthless creatures incapable of standing an independent watch. In the spectrum of humanity, non-quals were positioned at the absolute lower end of the pecking order, along with single cell forms of life found on the first two pages of high school biology books. I messcooked with Stuke. It was like being an understudy for the Flying Walendas! Survival was based on being able to duck insults while sinking verbal harpoons in vulnerable crewmembers. Stuke knew 'em all. He had seen them in the Med. You pull enough liberty with any crew and it doesn't take long to know everyone's soft spots.

"Pipe down, Rhodenhieser an' for chrissakes get off it!! Tell the boys about the dream girl you ran around with in Spain... The one who had warts on her eyelids and smoked cigars!"

Stuke was the master... Try to one-up the magnificent one and nine times out of ten he handed you back your fanny on a silver platter.

There was an art to messcooking. It was similar to lion taming... Drop your whip and the animals ate you.

It was simple. You set up for the meal, served the meal and cleaned up and washed the dishes... And between times you were the cook's step'n-fetch-it. You also had to make the tossed salad.

To produce the salad, you had to first figure out how many clowns would show up for the meal. If you guessed wrong and had excessive leftovers, the cooks took delight in raking you over the coals. If you were short, the last diners would hound you to make more, while announcing to anyone willing to listen what worthless bastards you were.

One night Stuke and I realized we wouldn't make it. The animals were hitting the salad heavy and we wouldn't make it past the third sitting. The lads being relieved wouldn't get salad unless we dropped down into the cool room and broke out more.

All of a sudden the great Stuke stands up and waves a five dollar bill.

"Who got it?? Five bucks to the sonuvabitch who finds the toenail!"

Then he went on to explain how he'd thrown this toenail in the salad as sort of a contest to liven things up. It sounded nuts, but everyone knew that Stuke was crazy enough to have pulled a screwball stunt like that so immediately, everyone lost interest in the salad. It worked like a champ.

Stuke sung Ray Charles. He knew every song Ray ever came up with. When he wasn't telling some sea story, usually an eight-foot lie gift-wrapped for rookies, he was singing.

Requin was packed with honest-to-God liars. Truth took such a beating on the boat that most of us got where we wouldn't have recognized it if it bit us on the butt.

Someone would tell something... Not to be outdone, some other animal would trump his tale with some instantly fabricated, properly embellished hokum... Then one of the master liars would hit us with a load of gold plated horse manure and take the cake. Bobby Ray Knight was the undisputed king of BS. When he entered the after battery crews mess, no amateur was safe.

One morning, this new kid was talking about this nice young lady he had dated in high school who had a leg brace. It was all about the difficulty he had getting her in and out of a VW. In comes someone from the forward torpedo room who goes into a song-and-dance about this barmaid he knew with a glass eye and wooden leg. Then Bobby Ray comes in from the forward engine room. He drew a cup of coffee and broke in...

"Hell, that's nothing. I knew this gal back home in Texas... She was missing a hand... As I recall, it got bit off by a wolf, but that doesn't matter. In any case, they whittled her this wooden hand and made her these fingers out of chicken bones. They connected the chicken bones with fishing line run up her sleeve, and by moving her arm she could work those chicken bones. Woman got so damn good at it, she could deal cards and change spark plugs!"

No one on the boat was in Bobby Ray's league. That man could throw a pork chop past a wolf.

Another master liar was the cook, Rodney A. Johnson, known affectionately as 'The Rat' or 'Rat' Johnson. If you got anything on anyone in the crew, you told Rat. Rat in turn would nail the poor unsuspecting devil right in the middle of a meal.

"Hey Jack, why don't you tell the boys about the WAVE Officer who chewed you out for winking at her? Understand she got you right between the running lights ... Must've been a picture... A big ox like you standing there saying 'Yes ma'am, Yes ma'am...'"

Rat was unmerciful ... He was like a circling shark. A little blood in the water and he was in for the kill.

We loved Rat. He had to be one of the best cooks in the Navy. All submarine cooks were good but the Rat was exceptional. I wish I had a nickel for every night I could smell cinnamon rolls cooking up in the conn... A four hour mid-watch wasn't half bad when Rat was night baker. Rat was famous for his night rations.

The other cooks would throw out a couple of loaves of bread and some cold cuts (if you were out a long time, the cold cuts got this kind of Robin Hood green furry stuff growing on it. The cooks cut it off under the assumption that surgical elimination cured everything)... And Navy mayonnaise. For those of you who have never had the pleasure of eating Navy mayonnaise, let me describe it for you. It came in a tin can with no label. Printed on the top of the can was something like ... 'Dressing, salad, mayonnaise type II mod 6 unit of issue one, each.' Holy catfish, the stuff was from another planet! Once the can was opened and air hit it, the damn stuff vulcanized. No kidding. That stuff formed a scab-like scum you had to lance with a knife if you wanted to put it on a sandwich.

Most good memories that submarine sailors carry with them concern the times spent laughing in the mess deck. It was the gathering place.. The dining establishment... The movie house... The club house... The card parlor... The training facility, and the primary assembly point for major collective ass-chewings.

One major butt-munching comes to mind. We had been out a long time and had developed a severe case of galloping boredom. It had reached a point where a lot of us could actually feel our toenails growing... It was that boring. Saw this movie *The Vikings*, and halfway through the movie, we started calling the principal characters by the names of the officers up forward. The Old Man became Ragnar, the grizzled old

leader... The Exec became Einar, and so on. During the movie, we outdid each other with Viking nonsense. After the film, the relief watch came forward... They had turned their foul weather gear inside out so that the brown hairy lining was on the outside, and they had stapled stupid looking cardboard horns on their caps. The appropriate laughs were obtained and then the idea took on a life of its own... Everyone started putting on a fake Scandinavian accent... Talking what passed for 'Viking talk' and giving the Odin salute to everyone passing fore and aft. Everyone outdid everyone else. Some clown made an aluminum fish and suspended it above the gyro repeater in the control room.

By the time the wardroom had figured out just what in the hell was going on, the whole thing was completely out of hand. It all came to 'all stop' when Ragnar, alias Ed Frothingham found the port and starboard lookouts wearing cardboard horns.

We got assembled and were treated to a very strongly worded discourse on naval decorum, discipline and collective stupidity. Frothingham, normally a very quiet and private man. gave a near volcanic performance and lectured us in pirate parrot terms. We got out of the Viking business damn near as fast as we got into it.

I hope I don't convey the impression that Requin was some sort of a seagoing clown act, far from it. We earned what they paid us... At times we earned a helluva lot more than they paid us.

(Editor's note from Cathy Armstrong, the 20 year old conned into typing this epic: the Requin WAS a seagoing clown act...)

They called it Cold War service. It sure was cold at times... And wet. The Requin had the rattiest collection of foul weather gear ever found in North America. It all looked like it came out of a Goodwill dumpster. At times our bridge looked like a hobo convention. My watch officers were 'Jim Buck' (Lt. James Buckner) and 'Noel K' (Lt. Noel K. Schilling). Both were ex-raghats. Buck had been a submarine corpsman who was selected for the Naval Academy... Graduated and married a Navy nurse... A redheaded sweetheart. Noel K. was a mustang in every sense of the word. If you could think of it, hell, he'd done it. He had forgotten more about diesel boats than most of us would ever know. I spent many hours on the bridge with these gentlemen. Most of the time it was cold, wet or some combination of both. I respected both officers... We all did. That needs to be said at this point. Requin had a damn fine wardroom. Our skippers, Ed Frothingham and Ed Frame (after serving as exec.) were tops. We would have gone hopscotching through hell with either one of them.

Mr. Gibbons was our next exec. He was hard to figure out at first. It took us time to recognize that this man had wall-to-wall intellectual curiosity, and a knowledge of wildlife, particularly birds, that made him a kind of Marlin Perkins to the crew.

My favorite Mr. Gibbons story goes like this:

It was a beautiful day. I was hanging out of the starboard lookout hole and my opposite number, Tim Conaty, was hanging out of the other one. Tim was, and remains, one of the closest friends I have ever had. He made third class petty officer well before I did and rode my back about it like an angel from hell. He would even make me acknowledge the weight of his superior leadership position and kiss his ring before he would pass up a cup of coffee to me, his old pal, still standing mid-winter topside watches when he was touring below decks. Conaty was a big fake... One of the most brilliant and gentlemanly individuals ever to serve aboard Requin... He worked at attempting to be as obnoxious as his contemporary crewman. When he put on his barnacle-encrusted sonuvabitch act, it was funny as hell. We didn't have a set of Encyclopedia Britannica, we had Arthur Leo 'Tim' Conaty. He was our resident 'Mr. Wizard'. He settled arguments, arbitrated ecclesiastical controversies, and explained natural phenomenon. Most of us were dumber than a box of rocks when it came to most subjects other than sports, automobiles, and females. Conaty was our secret weapon... If the wardroom slipped you a hot potato, you could adopt an outward appearance of pensive concentration and go find Tim. If Conaty couldn't give you the answer, it was either a national security issue or BS... One or the other. The wardroom had Gibbons, and we had Conaty, the after battery resident wise man.

Back to Gibbons. There we were manning the bridge, Dex Armstrong, Tim Conaty, and Mr. Gibbons. All of a sudden Mr. Gibbons points to about 015 and yells,

"Look at that! Do you see it? A Wilsons' Petrel!"

I didn't see a damn thing but ocean... Much less Wilson and whatever in hell a Petrel was. My first thought was, this is some kind of joke... Either that or Tim and I are trapped on the bridge with a gahdam commissioned lunatic. We soon learned that a Wilsons' Petrel was a sea bird and Mr. Gibbons was not only a master bird watcher but one of a handful of folks who would have recognized that this particular Petrel was way north of where he or she was supposed to be, and the only man on Requin who gave a damn.

In the months to come, Mr. Gibbons became one of the most beloved officers in the wardroom. Lads would drop below after a watch and sit in the crews mess drinking coffee and discussing cloud formations or sea turtles... Or peculiarities of nature like the Sargasso Sea. Nobody ever got bored standing watch with the man most affectionately known as 'The Bird Man'.

Then there was 'Big Joe DiJacomo'. He came aboard as the engineering officer. Rumor had it, he taught electronics at the Naval Academy. On duty he had the reputation of being a hard ass... Very exacting, and hell on nomenclature and proper phraseology. I once entered the control room and announced that one and two-way trash was lined up in the passageway aft and requested permission to, "...pop the sail door and drop shitcans."

After two or three minutes of having hell rained down on me there was no doubt that in the future I would say,

"Sir, request permission to put a man on deck to dump one and two-way trash."

Big Joe made a meal out of damn near everyone in the first month. A lot of the monkey business dried up with the arrival of Mr. D... I took my qualification walk through with the Italian terror. The only question he failed to ask was Mrs. Frothingham's maiden name and shoe size. My fear is that some day I will die and go to hell and have to re-qualify under Mr. D.

But every now and then, Mr. DiJacomo would throw the cooks out and take over the galley. He would put us all to work cooking an Italian meal. Damn we had fun... Up to that point I had never known that cigar ashes were an important ingredient in Italian cooking.

Mr. D. was a fine officer and he knew it.



Using proper terminology was important for a number of reasons. We had this officer named Hollis Holthouse... He was as clean cut as Don Winslow of the Navy. The animals called him, 'Holly Whorehouse'... It didn't fit. He tried hard but always came up shy of ringing the bell and getting a Kewpie doll. I heard somewhere that he left the navy and became some kind of off-the-wall minister. Anyway, one night we were snorkeling and running the fresh water vaps (Badger stills) in the forward engine room. It was hotter than the hubs of hell when you were making battery water. Holthouse was handling the dive, under instruction. The skipper was standing in the control room. Holthouse hit the 'press to talk' button on the 21 MC and made an inquiry relative to current conditions in the forward engine room... This voice comes back in a strong Texas accent,

"Sir, it's hotter'n two mice having sex in a wool sock."

The Captain shook his head. Bobby Ray would never understand or appreciate the concept of naval decorum. He once announced that his luck was SO bad, that if he had been Jayne Mansfield's baby, she would have bottle fed him.

Everyone loved the big ugly sonuvabitch.

There was another memorable character on Requin... The 'body snatcher' or Fritz 'the leprechaun' Badertcher. He was a hard worker... Most electricians were - don't ask me why. It may have been an aberration confined strictly to our boat.

Fritz was another one of our band of misguided deck apes. Most nonsense originated and matured in the deck force - not that idle hands were the devils workshop, far from it. By its very nature, the deck force became the institutional repository of the youngest and most spirited lads on board. Chipping and painting is not a cerebral exercise. You could handle 90% of it with less than two and a half brain cells totally engaged. In Brazil they have monkeys doing more interesting work than slopping zinc chromate on inanimate objects.

Stuke was the leading seaman. The Chief of the Boat (not Truman, he was great) was a little sonuvabitch with a cobra tattooed halfway up his arm. He came off an aircraft carrier and spent a disproportionate amount of his time telling us how gahdam clever naval air sailors were. We all felt that we had no desire to be a part of anything that 'Drifty' thought was clever.

Whenever Drifty went below we would 'float-test' one or two chipping hammers and paint scrapers. We never found one that could maintain buoyancy. Stuke and I may very well be the world's greatest authorities on topside equipment flotation. The bottom of the slip between piers 22 and 23, Des Sub Piers Norfolk is covered with the residue of numerous experiments. Drifty never could figure out where all the tools were going. Alcohol, tattoo ink and living on carriers had damaged his capacity to figure out anything more complex than tying his shoes. I sure as hell hope that the statute of limitations has run out on wanton destruction and intentional misplacement of government property. If not, Stuke and I will have to set up housekeeping in Latin America.



Fritz Badertcher couldn't swim. When you get qualified there is a tradition that says that you can't pin Dolphins on a dry shirt. Fritz announced to the world's largest collection of major league liars that he couldn't swim. We never figured he might be telling the truth. I'm not sure that anyone in ship's company had been close enough to the truth in a couple of years, to recognize it. Fritz hit the water and damn near set up housekeeping with several hundred missing chipping hammers.

Conaty made third class. In the caste system of subsurface society he had been vested with authority and placed in a position of responsibility. It didn't seem to prevent him from stealing a blanket off some poor sleeping sonuvabitch when he came off watch, or painting the atmosphere blue with unprintable invective whenever the below decks watch vented number 2 sanitary inboard without warning him. He was still the same old Conaty most of the time with occasional trips to the land of drunken power fantasies. Whenever Tim would get three sheets to the wind he would announce that he was a 'petty officer of the line' and denounce his former mates as occupying a rung of the social scale well below his recent elevation. We loved it. There was only one Conaty.

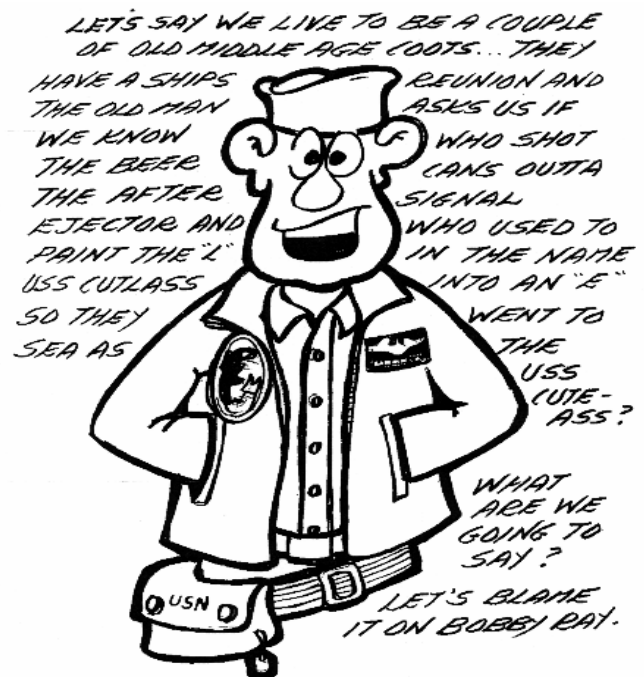
Non-rated lads stood topside watch. It was a lot like being the gate keeper at a lunatic asylum... Especially late at night when the local cab companies delivered drunks. Only other drunks find drunks amusing. Want to have fun? Try herding a drunk from the quarterdeck of a diesel boat to the after battery hatch and getting him below. Half the time you end up fishing the poor fool out of the water.

On nice nights, topside watch wasn't half bad. You checked the lines every 15 minutes and wrote 'All lines secure, moored as before' in a log that had ten million coffee cup rings on the cover. Between entries you played hopscotch between salvage air connection plates or shot pier rats with a pellet gun... Or you could listen to Norfolk late night radio brought to you by an endless number of flea bag establishments willing to sell sailors the entire known world for no down payment and easy monthly installments. A form of indentured servitude that replaced the company store for owning souls.

If you were lucky enough to pull the 4 to 8, you got to watch the sunrise over Craney island and catch the Krispie Kreme doughnut delivery. Controlling ten boxes of fresh doughnuts had a proportional effect on one's immediate popularity.

There was another submarine in our division, the USS Cutlass (SS-478). While standing topside watch one night, Stuke made an interesting discovery. The Cutlass, like all subs, had her name painted on her stern in 6 to 8 inch white letters. With minimal effort the "L" in Cutlass could be converted to an "E", changing the name to 'CUTEASS'. It took 'em the better part of a week to discover the conversion and all of three seconds to assign the blame.

At sea we usually wound up on the receiving end of some weird game dreamed up by the perverted antisubmarine wizards. We called it ping time. To add some kind of diabolical interest, naval air and destroyer forces dumped things called PDCs on us...



Practice depth charges. Little hand grenade-like devices thought up by some underemployed simpleton whose goal in life was to interrupt folk's sleep. You never got used to the fool things. Just when you were drifting off, some idiot would park a load of the racket makers on your underwater roof. Being at the bottom end of the naval chain allowed us to over simplify everything... A distinct advantage in naval service.

We operated with a naval air unit out of Bermuda, VP 45 known as Polly's boys. They were good if the amount of noise they made when we were trying to get some sleep is any indication. Very good.

When we were on the surface, Stuke, Conaty and I were lookouts and on the dive, planesmen. We rotated every hour and twenty minutes using the helm as our base. We were called 'section three'. We were good. They used us on battle stations.

The Requin had a fiberglass sail held together by a couple of thousand Monel metal bolts. This gave us a high bridge. 'High' being one helluva relative term when compared to battleships, aircraft carriers and the Cape May ferry. It never seemed too damn high in heavy weather.

The bridge had only one piece of equipment... The TBT (Target Bearing Transmitter). A device used to transmit information on ships or shore locations below to anyone interested in that kind of information. At times it held a portable signal light for visual communication... The light could be dismounted and taken below. The worthy grand keeper of the signal light was a second class signalman named Stokes. Stokes owned a bosun's pipe and could pipe all the calls. I never figured them out. Only Noah, Admiral Lord Nelson, and about a handful of retired tin can sailors gave a damn about bosun pipes. Well, Stokes had this zeon searchlight. It was one of the brightest things on the planet... It could throw a light beam all the way to the horizon or cook the eyes out of any P2V pilot who happened to sneak up on you at night.

Oh, and we had another use for the searchlight...

When we would come in from sea, the married guys would invariably con the single guys into standing duty the first night in. We always had a battery charge scheduled that night. All the officers went ashore and left Lt. Noel K. Schilling with the charge. At times, one of our girls would come down and we would take off for a little half-hour of commingling bliss in the back seat of some shipmate's car in the parking lot. We would mount the searchlight in the bridge socket and flash the car if the lad was needed aboard. The searchlight was appropriately named the 'Lucy Light' after a rather amorous third class dental tech who bestowed her favors rather liberally among lonely E-3s a long way from home.

We carried four types of torpedoes: 14's, 16's, 27's, and 37's. We would fire the rascals and have to surface, then go find the fool things and recover them. Recovering a floating torpedo is a tricky operation. You would come alongside of the one ton monster, put a swimmer over the side to wrestle with the beast while the deck apes

rigged the torpedo loading boom. The poor devil in the water had to place a stainless steel recovery band around the torpedo. You have to picture one ton of steel fish bobbing around in the swells and some raghat trying to slip a metal ring on it... It was like trying to put a garter belt on a raging wet rhino.

Capt. Frothingham and some other officer invented a recovery net... They built the contraption on the Orion. It worked great... It revolutionized picking up fish. We named it the 'Requin Recovery Net'... I left the ship and never knew what ever happened to the net. It had to be the most wonderful labor saving device ever built by the hand of man. It put our wardroom right up there with Leonardo Di Vinci and Edison.

When we loaded for sea we looked like some kind of buccaneer ship. There was no place to store chow for more than about a week, so we packed food everywhere. Cases of canned goods... Beans, peas, etc., were stacked up two, and at times three layers deep in the passageway. You damn near had to be a lizard to get in and out of the lower bunks. Potatoes were brought on board in bags and either stored in bench lockers in the after battery crews mess or packed in the showers... By the time they opened the showers, the potatoes would be long gone.

Flour and sugar were stored outboard the engines in both the forward and after engine rooms... Port side. Outboard the two starboard engines, you had twenty pound cans of coffee. Going into the yards, you stored coffee everywhere... Up to, and including the skippers, hip pockets. Coffee was the medium of exchange in the yards... Par value was directly tied to the coffee bean. Non-scheduled work was accomplished by a primitive form of barter called 'Cumshaw'. In the world of Cumshaw, a twenty-pound can of Navy coffee trumps everything. I never really understood why, but in the yards, everything cost coffee...

Most of the chow was stored in the passageways of the crews after-berthing compartment in the after battery. Since the lower rated animals were usually the ones tagged for loading the stores, they knew where all the good stuff was located. Since I was an After Battery Rat... Who lived in Hogan's Alley, I used to make certain that a case of peanut butter and a box of crackers found its way over in that direction. At night someone would whisper,

"Anyone near any Vienna Sausage?"..."I'll toss you a can of peaches for some Peter Pan."

We were a Peter Pan boat. Oh, it's true, we carried a few Skippy eaters, but they were a distinct minority. Skippy eaters were treated like subversive, non-believing heathens. Peter Pan eaters were the good guys. We won all peanut butter elections and the cooks knew that bringing Skippy on board could lead to physical violence. It was like talking during a Rocky and Bullwinkle cartoon... Tongue removal could result. Vigilantes ruled the after battery. You either rode with the good guys or became a Skippy eater.

Rocky and Bullwinkle were the patron saints of messcooks. Bad mouth either the squirrel or the moose, and weird and exotic things began showing up in your mashed potatoes. One of the cardinal rules of underwater courtesy and etiquette states that he who aggravates a messcook or cook should not be surprised to find iguana droppings in his soup. The after battery was a jungle.

Speaking of coffee, in the crew mess we had two contraptions that could give you a hard time. The coffee urn and the garbage ejector (the GDU, garbage disposal unit).

First the coffee urn... It stood outside of the galley. It had a gravity drain to number two sanitary tank. The drain line had a gate valve and a kick-throw between the urn and the tank. Failure to completely close these two valves on blowing sanitary tanks, allowed the wonderful contents of number two sanitary to percolate up into the urn and make its unique contribution to the taste of Requin coffee.

I learned to drink coffee aboard Requin. Every cup had a hydraulic oil slick floating on it... For years I wondered why in the hell non-navy coffee didn't taste like boiled Yugoslavian Army socks and come with rainbow colors floating around in it.

The garbage ejector... You have to understand our solid waste disposal problem. When Requin was down... Running submerged, trash, garbage and junk collected. Straight garbage got packed in weighted bags... Nylon bags that fit into tapered stainless steel cans called sharpshooter buckets. These buckets formed garbage into bagged slugs that could be forced to sea using 225 lb. ship service air. We weighted the bags so that they went directly to the bottom and did not give away our position.

Failure to properly secure the muzzle door to the GDU would allow sea water to come shooting out of the inner vent. Nothing could interrupt the evening movie any faster than the unique sound of high pressure water hitting our return ventilation line in the overhead. All leaks had classifications... This was a 'Cow Pissing on a Flat Rock' leak.

Diesel submarines leak. Only Hollywood diesel boats don't leak. One of the rudest awakenings you get in the sub force is finding out that movies lie. There isn't a whole helluva lot of romance and adventure in the world of a submarine qualified E-3, but you make great friends... The best shipmates in the fleet.

You must understand griping... Constructive, creative griping, not to be confused with counter-productive whining. This may seem weird, but we maintained high morale by inventing unique ways to gripe. No one could take a mole hill and build an Alpine range any faster than the After Battery Rats.

Once we were overrun with roaches. It got so bad that eventually they had to fumigate the boat. Everyone made roach cracks. We used to knock before opening the bread locker so they could run and hide. We used to tell people to be considerate since the light could hurt their eyes... We used to announce that Requin had the kind of raisin

bread that, if you didn't like raisins, you could shake it and all of the raisins would get up and run away.

We got other strange critters that were cannibals. We used to yell,

"Trade you two blind ones for one with no teeth."

We raised complaining to the level of fine art...

Standing bridge watch (lookout) in heavy weather could make time drag. When you are cold or wet, or a combination thereof, hours seem to drag on. It really feels good to hear your relief request permission to come up... You would give him your binoculars and tell him about any contacts you held and anything radar held over the horizon. A smart lad would have checked the PPI scope in the conn before coming up and would already have a clear picture of what contacts we were working. Once you had performed all the mandated rituals, the deck officer would grant you permission to lay below. You would drop down, make your way through the conn, pay your respects to the lads standing watch in the control room and move aft to the crews mess to draw a cup of hot coffee.

If your foul-weather gear was wet, you would draw three cups of coffee (one for the throttleman, oiler and yourself) and make your way aft to the forward engine room. You would remove your wet gear and spread it out on the engine covers to dry... Then visit with the engineman until the heat from the two Fairbanks 1600HP diesels knocked the chill out of you.

Bobby Ray, John O'Neil and Dutch Vanderheiden usually were on watch and we'd tell some sea stories and catch up on the scuttlebutt.

After a while, you'd take the dirty cups back to the messdeck and go hunt up an empty bunk to crawl into. You see, unlike the officers and rated men, non-rated men hotsacked... You didn't have your own assigned bunk. You just found an empty one and stole a couple of blankets off of other guys who were sleeping, and crawled in. If it was cold, the engines drew a draft through the boat every time someone went topside through the conning tower hatch (known as the pneumonia hole). We would crawl into our bunks fully clothed, boots and all. I used to pull a watch cap down over my ears and eyes. All things considered, sleeping wasn't half bad on the Requin.

Our call sign was 'ROCKET WOLF' and our call letters were NYEC. I can't think of what value this would have for anyone, but it goes to show that the training sticks with you. You never forget.

It's funny what you remember. If you were moored on the starboard side of pier 22 in the forward nest, you could shoot beer cans out of the after signal ejector and put them on the boat deck of the Orion. I would not like to go into detail where this specific knowledge was gained.

Most submariners have a bunch of tales of thrilling moments. Capt. Frothingham kept our thrilling moments to a minimum. He was not an advocate of the unexpected.

We hit the Yorktown ammo pier once and bit a large chunk of lumber out of it. We sledge-hammered the wood out of the bullnose, replaced the paint and reduced the incident to a laughable memory.

Once the USS King (DLG-1) hit us with an ASROC-assisted homing torpedo. It busted through a hull flange, shearing the bolts of the forward signal ejector. We took some water in the forward torpedo room. Considering the operating instructions that Capt. Frothingham had to follow, we were as restricted as a duck taped to a shotgun muzzle. We all knew that given an equal playing field, our wardroom could out-think the surface navy every time. They were good. Requin was better... We held our own.

We were 'Dungaree Navy'. In simple terms that means we had no uniform of the day. In port or at sea, it was all the same... Dungarees. We lived in dungarees. At sea, water... Fresh water, was precious. This was the pre-nuclear Navy. Living was rough... Air wasn't that great. If you were down for any length of time, it got so bad it wouldn't support combustion... At times you couldn't light a smoke. CO2 built up. You absorbed it with lithium hydroxide.

Air got foul... Cooking odors... Bilge stench... Sanitary inboard vent air... And 80 men missing regular showers, combined to create a pretty ripe atmosphere. It didn't take a high I.Q. to figure out why they called them pig boats. About Requin... She was three hundred eleven feet six inches long... Powered by four 1600HP Fairbanks Morse diesel engines connected to 500 KW generators by direct drive aft of each engine. The generators supplied power to a pair of Westinghouse motors or the batteries. We had 252 tons of batteries (126 in the forward well; 126 aft.) Each cell weighed a ton... MLA 77A Exide wet lead acid. (You qualify under Mr. D. and you never forgot. It is weird what rattles around in your head after thirty years... Give Mr. D credit. I missed two questions on final qualification. I didn't know that Yarway made the levelometer gauges for the sanitary tanks and that the muzzle roller in the torpedo tubes was phenolic... The rest were bronze. I never forgot.)

Requin was a working boat. The nuclear subs had long ago become the focal point of the public's interest. The glamor associated with subsea service had been transferred to the nukes. Our boats were associated with the past.

We were assigned duty like target for anti-submarine elements and cat and mouse games with navy air. We called it ping time. No glamour, just long hours... Days of boring work. But, we did it... And we did it well. What pride we had we got from the association with good men, a great wardroom and a good boat... Teamwork, and a unique light-hearted way of getting the job done.

The Old Man was good. He was quiet... He didn't say much. If he called you by name it felt good... That might sound funny, but he wasn't given to the small talk that the crew engaged in.

He was from New England... He had no middle name. His name was listed as Edward (NMN) Frothingham. What the hell was NMN? No middle name... Navy abbreviated everything. He only had eight fingers - he had lost two in a helo-transfer. We were told that he was damn sensitive about the subject, so we'd stay off the topic. Outside of hearing, he was known as 'Eight Fingers'. Once when I was standing watch we had a helo-transfer. Capt. Frothingham and Jim Buck were on the bridge. The Old Man turned to the lookouts and said,

"Gentlemen, put your hands in your pockets!" We didn't laugh.

I said he was good. He was a true seaman... He had a million evasion tricks up both sleeves. He perfected the airless surface, a little ditty that involved a rapid angle change allowing the boat to broach and fall back, trapping air in the forward tanks. It drove the cooks nuts.

I vividly recall our introduction to Capt. Frothingham...

When we went to sea, we drew sea print films... 16mm movies. They constituted most of our entertainment... Stuke made up the difference. We had two projectors (ANQB Navy projectors) but, only one cinemascope lens. The raghats had one projector and the wardroom had the other. Prior to Frothingham's arrival, we had an unwritten gentleman's agreement with the wardroom... We would alternate nights with the cinemascope lens.

One night, in accordance with the existing agreement, we were well into the first reel of the film we were showing, when Quesada (the wardroom steward --- we called him 'Q') showed up and said,

"Zee Captain, he want zee lens."

"Go tell him, it isn't the officers' turn."

Q shoved off and went forward... We continued to watch the film. In a minute, he turned up again...

"Capt'n serious ... He no fooling ... He want to have lens."

We sent him forward again to have the exec explain the standing arrangement to the skipper.

Shortly after Q left, someone yelled,

"ATTENTION ON DECK!!"

And there was the Old Man in all of his radiant glory. He lit us up like a pinball machine, and when he left we knew damn well that if he sent word for anything in the future it would go forward or we would be hanging by our toes. It was very clear... Absolutely clear.

We had a cook... His name was Custer. He never got used to the crews' monkey business. When he was baking a cake one night we started carrying a 3 to 5 degree down angle. When he pulled his cake out of the oven, one side was about five inches higher than the other. Everyone was in on the gag and had a great time making comments to the effect that it was the weirdest gahdam cake they had ever seen.

Another time, the poor devil baked bread during a time when we dove and while snorkeling, pulled a vacuum in the boat. His bread came out like a dozen black bricks. He went nuts... We rolled on the deck laughing!

Custer made hamburgers one night. While he was cooking them, we kept pulling the electric breaker to the grill. Custer was the only guy in the crew who had no idea that he was about to serve damn near raw hamburgers to the crew. When he did, everyone started mooing like a cattle herd and yelling,

"Mine's not dead... It's still moving!"

Then we started singing the theme song from the Rawhide TV show. Custer often wondered if we were all a little light in the brains department. We loved it... You could always get him to hit a number five dry fly.

Being at sea wasn't that bad... Especially riding the surface. Some of my finest memories are of nights standing watch on the bridge.

Summer nights were great. The boat would knife along and sea water would rise up along the tank tops, slip away aft and cascade off, leaving millions of twinkling phosphorescent stars winking back at you in the wake. It doesn't get any better than that.

Every now and then porpoise would play in the bow wave... Coffee always tasted better on nights like that... If you could get a visitor to the bridge and assume your watch long enough to allow you to drop down to the 0-2 level and catch a smoke, it sure made life worth living.

You can't stand bridge watches with someone and not get to know them. I've never met any of Tim's family but I have always felt that I knew them... And I could tell stories on Stuke the entire night. You get close when you wear Dolphins.

Jason, I have no idea what sort of recollections you are interested in. We didn't do anything like you see in the movies ... Or pull any rabbits out of magical hats. We did the routine work of peacetime submarine assignments. Most of us were young fellows still in the wild oat-sewing stage of life... Hootin' holler, bark at the moon, lads. We took our slice of life right out of the middle.

Today diesel boat sailors have been relegated to a place on the chart of the development of man, down around the point previously occupied by Cro-Magnon primates. The Requin is a neanderthal now... A living naval fossil. Time moves on... Technology renders perfectly serviceable things obsolete. Obsolescence takes hold and you are history.

Requin is like a racehorse that has been put out to stud. Maybe some lad in Pittsburgh will visit the old girl and it will ignite his spirit of adventure. Adventure lives in all boys... Maybe he will go to New London and then find himself standing on pier 22 at Des Sub Piers in Norfolk, waiting for his new boat. If she were half the boat Requin was, he'd spend a lifetime looking back and knowing the best times in his life were punching holes in the ocean on her.

More Recollections by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Ray - I don't think after battery rats are allowed to write their recollections of their duty aboard diesel boats. I think they made us sign some kind of statement to that effect... If you divulged anything about your service aboard diesel boats, some JG from the Office of Naval Intelligence will come directly to your place of residence and remove the frontal lobe of your brain - and your tongue.

All the great submarine books are written by officers; *"THE THRILLING WARTIME ADVENTURES OF RICHARD "BIG DICK" OHARA, COMMANDER OF THE USS MUDCAT (SS-ZIPPTY DOO DAH), TERROR OF THE MUMBO JUMBO STRAITS"* You never see *"THE THRILLING ADVENTURES OF WILLIE "THE ANIMAL" JOHNSON, MESSCOOK & STARBOARD LOOKOUT - - - TOPSIDE WATCH AND GEEDUNK TRUCK COMMANDO. THE MAN THE NAVY USED TO PROVE PENICILLIN WOULD CURE DAMN NEAR EVERYTHING."*

Take a Master Chief. In the late '50s and early '60s, a Master Chief had SERIOUS power. If I recall my high school civics, a Master Chief could become President right after the impeachment of the Postmaster General. In certain primitive societies, a Master Chief was considered equal to, or greater than, their god of sexual abandonment and drunken revelry. A Master Chief was a BIG deal... If they were REALLY hungry, they could make a meal out of the entire deck force.

I was an after battery rat. Most of my boat service was spent as a qualified, non rated animal. A single cell invertebrate at the absolute lowest end of the Naval food chain.

Naval Regs and submarine force policy did not allow independent thought below E-5, except for use of toilet tissue and tying of shoelaces.

My book, "*LIFE IN HOGAN'S ALLEY AND NEAT STUFF YOU CAN DO ON HELM WATCH*" will be out next year. I plan to follow it up with "*THE LITTLE GOLDEN BOOK OF PROSTITUTES AND BARMAIDS*".

We weren't the most informed folks. We actually believed it was impossible for an enlisted man to make Master Chief or Chief of the Boat, if he could identify his mother or came from married parents... And that the 'Goat Locker' was a seagoing franchise, owned and operated by ordained disciples of the Devil... And that Hell was the home of people who invented the chipping hammer and paint scraper.

Life was simple below 3rd. Class. If you could steal a blanket off some poor sonuvabitch hotsacking in the Alley, liked paperback sexbook literature, could eat Spam and like it, could sleep through venting #2 sanitary tank inboard, had a girl on the beach with loose panty elastic and beer money and could win an anchor pool every now and then, life wasn't half bad.

On the other hand, if you had to messcook, dive #2 sanitary tank in the yards, had a sea print film case fall out of the overhead vent lines and land on your face, life was not so good. In fact, life got totally terrible when you returned from 6 weeks of punching invisible holes in the Atlantic to find that the girl with the loose panty elastic was that day's winner of the ovulation anchor pool.

Life alternated between good and bad... Bug juice and sea stores cigarettes... Hand-me-down foul weather gear... Mid rats made from recipes tested in Japanese POW camps and the application of the advice and wisdom of tattoo-covered, cigar smoking Chief Petty Officers, who never understood that the 14th. Amendment freed all slaves. - - It's all in my book.

USS Requin (SS-481) by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I rode Requin. Today the wonderful old gal sits out in the Ohio River at Pittsburgh all dolled up looking one helluva lot better than when I rode her. They gave her a total battery hysterectomy and ripped off her screws... She's also a little light in the rack (bunks) department. But, like the gahdam stuffed owl you have perched on your mantle, she looks the same. Looking at her sitting in quiet water securely fastened to a green riverbank... Out to stud, so to speak... A floating jungle gym for school kids. You only have to close your eyes and it all comes back.

It's '60 and the old girl is slicing through the North Atlantic with a bone in her teeth. It's nighttime, phosphorescent water smashing through the limber holes, sliding aft through the superstructure then sliding down over the tanktops and cascading back into the sea, creating a million twinkling stars passing the screw guards. Cutlass (SS-478) was

somewhere up ahead. The lookouts couldn't raise her light so she had to be hull down over the horizon. Her voice call was "Cabbage" and ours was "Rocketwolf"...(the trivial crap you remember forty goddam years later). On the bridge, two lookouts and the OOD. Night baking smells floating up from the open conning tower hatch. The only sound other than water slapping at the limber holes and doing its damndest to pop our line locker lids, was a breeze making weird sounds with the whip antenna.

"Cabbage, Cabbage this is Rocketwolf...Rocketwolf..do you read me?"

"Rocketwolf, Cabbage we read you two by two... Too loud and too often. What'cha need Rocketwolf?"

"Halifax Radio says rain your direction; seen any?"

"That's affirmative. Coming down like a cow pissing on a flat rock."

"Flat rock, aye... Much obliged. Rocketwolf out."

"Bridge, conn... We should be hitting a low pressure front with heavy squalls any minute now. You want us to send up rain gear?"

"Conn, bridge... That's affirmative. Have whoever is camped on the trim manifold run us up some gear... And a black and bitter, two blond and sweets and a load of whatever the night baker is pulling out of the oven."

"Very well."

The lieutenant turns toward the lookouts... They've been a team for damn near two years. A watch section... Smallest bloodbrother fraternity on earth. Born by COB assignment, but a union consummated in ice and saltwater.

"Hey, either of you guys want to slip down into the sail and take a piss, catch a quick smoke and screw up your night vision?" "You bet, sir!"

"Conn, bridge. Wake up whoever is playing radarman down there... Have him take a couple of sweeps around and report anything in our area."

"Bridge, conn... Just the 'Cuteass'... She hasn't changed course for two hours."

"Any aircraft?" "That's negative." "Very well."



*THE REQUIN AS SEEN THROUGH
THE EYES OF MR. DIAGIACOMO.*

"OK gentleman, quick smoke and a whiz... One at a time... No screwin' around. The old man or exec come up, get rid of the butt and the usual cover story - Checking the running light connection, thought it was flickering. You know, the standard 'smoke'n pee' cover story."

It's O.K. to tell this stuff now. The statute of limitations has run out on screwin' off on lookout. At the time, catching a smoke down next to the snorkel defuser required an oath involving the future health of your mother and the drinking of chicken blood. The Navy frowned on less than three men on the bridge...The old multiple eyeball theory. We had junk bolted to the bridge that could pick out people in Scandinavia and tell the boys from the girls, but John Paul Jones said three man minumum. J.P. Jones was an officer who obviously never understood the raghats appreciation for a pee and a Pall Mall. Capt. Jones was also surface navy. Once, I saw a painting with Jones standing on the deck of an old sailing ship. He was up his knees in dead bluejackets, 70% of his guns had been dismantled, busted masts, collapsed sails. tackle, rigging and aloft gear littered the decks. What was left of his gunnels were dished in and there was blood all over the place... And here was John Paul standing in the middle of this painting looking like he had just stepped out of a naval tailors, yelling, "I have just BEGUN to fight!"

Remember the old saying, "Ten percent never get the word"? Classic example.

Where in the hell were we? Oh yes... Some clown would bring up the foulweather gear. Salvation Army dumpsters and Pakistani P.O.W. s got better issue than we carried in our foulweather gear locker. The gahdam rubber boots were designed for some monster with rhino feet. We had eight right boots and two left boots. Didn't matter, you could wear two rights, two lefts or any combination thereof, it just didn't matter. The gear was ripped and had become rather gamey. In the winter, the North Atlantic gets a tad chilly. To survive, diesel boat sailors played the "lets see how much gear I can laminate my body with" game. Muliple layers of foul weather pants can turn urination into a never to be forgotten skill... A real olympic event when you add 14 degree rolls and the bow chopping. The inside of our gear needed Dr. Scholls odor eaters. Rumor had it that somewhere in our gear locker there was a dead mule no one could find.

Once the rain hit, all the fun went out of being a lookout. Webster could use the following example to illustrate "miserable"; Being on lookout north of Halifax, late January in heavy rain. Cold and wet the basic ingredients of a long night. But long nights are where lasting friendships are forged. You don't recognize that at eighteen or nineteen... It hits you in your fifties when you stand on the deck of your old boat welded to the dock in Pittsburgh and peer through recently acquired glasses for some old sonuvabitch who shared long nights, strong coffee and wet gear with you many years ago. The fraternity has no expiration date... We get older... We get uglier , but we've left too many beer glass rings on too many tables in weird places to forget each other.

When your tour was over you'd turn your binnoculars over to the poor half asleep sonuvabitch who relieved you, and you turn over your visual contacts, collect coffee cups and head below. Our control room doubled as a clubhouse for clowns. Senior

petty officers were rewarded by the gods of underwater service by being given watch assignments where you got to sit in the control room on a padded locker where it was warm and dry and you could drink coffee and smoke while you talked about something called "The good old days where they rode wooden submarines and plugged the leaks with various body parts ripped off messcooks and lookouts." We figured if bullshit ever got to five cents a pound, we were going to sell anything assigned to a manifold watch.

"Hey sweetheart, how's the weather out tonight?"

You and your watch mate are standing there trying to light soggy cigarettes dripping water all over the deck and now Mr. Submarines wants to play Mr. Comedian...

"Great Chief... Back in the old days when me, Noah and all the animals went to sea, this was a shower. Just think, if we had just killed all of the monkeys, there would be no gahdam Chief Enginemen or machinist mates."

When you got tired of batting horsemanure fore and aft with the elderly set, you would head into the crews mess and draw a cup of whatever was passing for hot coffee on that particular night. We called it "Boiled Yugoslavian army sock." You always could find something that would pass for food in a third world country, on a messdeck table. They called the stuff midnight rations... "Midrats"... Usually a couple of loaves of fresh baked bread, some navy mayonaise and cold cuts. Navy mayonaise healed itself. It came in a labelless can... You zipped the lid out of the can and damn near immediately, a vulcanized scum formed on the top like a self-sealing tractor tire. To get to the damn spreadable mayonaise, it was like trying to punch your way through the side of a weather balloon. Nobody ever recognized what-in-the-hell the cold cuts were made out of, or cared. Could have been Cocker Spanial for all we knew. But it made a sandwich and no diesel boat sailor passed for a gourmet. Once you had wrapped yourself around a couple of mid rat sandwiches, you pulled a couple of cups outa the rack and drew coffee for the oiler and throttleman in the forward engine house. Then you worked your way through the snoring mob in the after battery.

The A.B. was like 25 bums living in a refrigerator crate. When we got to the engine room and handed out the coffee, we pulled off our wet foulweather gear and draped it over the Fairbanks engine covers. All throttlmen had the straight poop on everything. Never knew why... Some kind of underground telegraph, probably. We always figured the engineman could hypnotize the yeoman, or had an 8x10 glossy photo of the exec checking into a motel with a sheep. Whatever it was, enginemen always knew what was happening. After a while, you returned to the after-battery to look for an empty rack to turn in to, and some sound sleeper whose blankets you could steal.

I loved the boat. Great crew. Great wardroom. Best damn cooks and our corpsman, Master Chief Rohr was better than anything you'd find at the Mayo Clinic. I love kidding boat sailors. Aside from marrying my bride and the birth of my kids, the highpoint of my life came on the morning Cdr. Ed Frothingham pinned silver dolphins on my wet dungaree shirt.

I hope I don't step on too many nuke toes... Those of us who rode conventional boats put up with a lot of nuclear power tribal bullshit. We didn't initiate it... Some idiot planted a seed that going nuke was going first class... Diesel boat sailors were inferior - less than desirable folks. Jet pilots never treated prop fliers like trash... Marines who arrive by helicopter don't trash fellow Marines who arrive by landing boat. If a nuke boat sailed up my storm sewer, I wouldn't walk across the street to see it. I know it's wrong to feel like that. Hell, I've always blamed Rickover... He was in charge. He not only condoned it, but pushed it. I've never felt comfortable about that kind of thinking. Keep a zero bubble... Dex.

Rationale for Retroactive Combat Award

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Stone, you old oxydized sonuvabitch, I am seeking support for the Retroactive Consideration of my Application for the Award of a Purple Heart.

"IN 1960, IN ACTION AGAINST A HOSTILE FOREIGN POWER AND IN DEFENSE OF MY COUNTRY, I WAS HIT BY A HIGH VELOCITY PROJECTILE AND HAD TO BE REMOVED FROM A NON SECURED COMBAT ZONE."

Sometime in the spring of 1960 while visiting Bells, that well known establishment where members of Naval subsurface community went to seek refined refreshment and sophisticated interaction with members of the delicate sex. Bells, where you could get drunk and a set of doeskin blues simultaneously. Bells, where it was impossible to use "clean", "sanitary" and "men's room" in the same sentence. Bells, where iguana piss was a buck fifty a pitcher.

The HMCS Terra Nova was in. The "Terry N" was some kind of whiz kid Canadian can. In 60, she was so new she still had strips of masking tape around her hull numbers.

We'd been out... Came in, got mail, fresh milk... Put in a charge... Blues, half a bottle of Aqua Velva... Bum five bucks and over the side. Nothing complicated, just wanted to get off the gahdam boat. We had reached that point where "Fresh air, a f*ck and a bicycle ride would kill you." (Strictly SUBRON 6).

We were in Bells... Minding our own business, enjoying polite conversation... The global economy... Women's rights... Environmental issues... SAT scores vs. the entrance requirements at M.I.T... The kind of stuff all submariners discuss. Wait, maybe it was 'Who played first base for Cleveland in 1938?'... Sex with small animals... And how to steal electrician's knives from Fleet Supply... I forget...

Anyway, I had wrapped myself around the better part of a pitcher of draft. I had your basic E-3 bladder... If you were equipped with an E-3 bladder, they come with a high pee rate. In other words, compared with a high capacity Master Chief bladder, you were looking at something like a four trips to the head versus one. Or considering the Chief,

maybe four head runs vs. a stop in the alley on the way back to DES SUB Piers. Above E-6, the whole world was your urinal.

I was in the head returning Bells' best to the Elizabeth River, when one of the lads from the neighborhood up north... Her Majesties fleet elite... made some very intelligent observation regarding the United States having some form of solo intercourse with itself. I was not present to enjoy this intellectual discussion.

I was a recently qualified messcooking escapee, who was rapidly reaching the point where the operation of 13 buttons and urinal plumbing become mental challenges. Once I figured it all out, I congratulated myself and made the big mistake of attempting to return to my point of origin.

When I opened the door, it was obvious that Canadian - American relations had rapidly degenerated. I was later told that I got in some good licks... You couldn't prove it by me... For at some point early in the action, one of our former allies bounced a gahdam pool ball off my head and put my lights out.

Somebody brought me back to the boat. Doc Rohr repaired me... Doc was a kind of veterinary surgeon, who studied under Ganhgis Khan.

For weeks at morning quarters, I was referred to as the "Eight ball who took an eight ball" and the "Cueball screwball." Sympathetic consideration among submarine sailors begins with limb and sight loss.

I was wounded in action against a hostile foreign power while defending the United States. It was in the middle of the Cold War... The Battle of Bells... Cold War. Don't know who won, but it WAS a hostile action. Anyone who doesn't believe it was hostile, wasn't between the juke box and the pool table at Bells that night. Someone told me that some poor sonuvabitch off the Cubera got his hair parted with a pool cue and that when the action concluded, they found some Canadian with his head stuck through the juke box speaker.

Should you have the sort of influence necessary to effect consideration of such an award, it would be the "COLD WAR DIESEL BOAT PURPLE HEART", with subsequent recognition for Black Eye in Bermuda and being Cold Cocked in Montevideo.

If the Secretary of the Navy is not available, how about Sherri at Houlihan's? She's prettier, smarter, has chest development... The kind that teenage late night fantasies are made of. . Hell, all the SECNAV has are 3-piece suits and lousy neckties. Wingnut

The Truth Behind "Fleet Annie" by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I'm going to say it straight out... You boat sailors are going to have to take this one 'cold turkey'. There's NO Fleet Annie - Never was. Me 'n Jack Mulvanney created her. That's

the truth. 'Dex' n' Jack were absolute proof that the submarine school's screening process failed to filter out all the idiots... It was like a birth control diaphragm that you could get a bowling ball through. We were certifiable idiots, our credentials backed by testimonials from both the exec and COB.

Jack and I got a lot of doo-doo assignments in our non rated days. One day, we were sent as a working party of two, to pick up 'flash covers' for the new mattresses we got in the yard. For those of you who may have forgotten, a flash cover was a naugahide-like cover for your mattress. They were green and for the first three months the sonuvabitches smelled like airplane glue.

Nasty things... On hot nights when you crawled up on one, sweaty and stripped to the waist, you stuck to it like a gahdam air mail stamp.

Well, they gave me 'n Jack this truck... Kind of the military version of a pick-up... And we lit out... In the non-rated world, unsupervised boondoggles with a truck thrown in, don't happen every day.

When we arrived at the building at N. O. B., the clown who owned the magic fanny we had to kiss to get the flash covers was 'at chow'. 'At chow' for shore duty folks can last anywhere from two hours to two weeks. Jack and I crawled up and stretched out in the truck bed.

There we were, flat on our backs staring up into a clear blue sky, contemplating the complex issues surrounding national security, when we noticed this big water tank above us. Written on the side in gigantic blue letters is "NAVAL SUPPLY NORFOLK" and under it, it read "SERVICE TO THE FLEET SINCE 1906".

"Hey Jack, what a great tatoo THAT would make for some old retired East Main hooker..."

"Yeah, great... Fleet Annie - Service to the Fleet Since 1906..."

Then we spent two hours creating Fleet Annie. She was an old lady... Kinda like Mary Poppins. When she got too old to market her product in the competitive commercial world, she decided to give it away to non rated guys who had the duty and couldn't get ashore. Kind of the big kid version of the Tooth Fairy. Annie became totally invisible to anyone owning a kahki uniform. Jack also talked me into saying that Annie would also distribute her free favors to non-quals - since Jack, the co-inventor of Annie, was non qualified. I agreed, knowing full well that this went against the tradition of SUBRON 6. We figured that Annie was so good, it would be quick - therefore, it wouldn't take long and she could whisper stuff in your ear about the trim and drain system.

You must remember, we were not only non rated, but non rated idiots... Paired up.

Annie had this tatoos on her left breast... A fouled anchor through dolphins with a pink ribbon below it reading "SERVICE TO THE FLEET SINCE 1906". No fantasy was official without this official SUBRON 6 logo.

Annie was the Patron Saint of the Deck Force. Senior leadership never understood why when the animals passed each other they exchanged the obligatory, "How's Annie?"

Once, we actually saw Annie... Montevideo '62 - '63... Old wrinkled lady on the seawall... Black dress... Granny shoes... Black straw hat... Little white gloves. We were sliding along the waterfront, breaking out mooring lines and wetting down heavies, when some idiot yelled, "Hey, there's ANNIE!!!" Within seconds, 15 guys are jumping up and down yelling, "HEY, ANNIE!!!" and waving like fools.

Poor old lady probably got home that night and said,

"Pedro... No go Disneyland... American sailors totally nuts... No trust... Boatload of complete idiots in town tonight." Perceptive lady...

Like all those frogs girls have to kiss in order to find the prince... Do you realize how many old ladies bras we're going to have to peek in to find the real genuine Fleet Annie? At our age, we don't have a helluva lot of time to complete this historical work.

Hogan's Alley by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Remember "The Alley"? On Requin, it was six racks in the after battery - outboard - aft of the well manhole. Home of the most senior, most worthless non rated wild men on the boat. The nest where every hairbrain prank, underhanded scheme, diabolical plot and stupid idea germinated, hatched and blossomed forth. Yup, you got it - the Varmint Pit.

The ringleader of this band of unrepentant idiots was known as the Mayor of the Alley. The motto was: "If you ain't heard a good rumor in four hours... Start one." In the annals of Naval history, Hogan's Alley ranks right up there with pirate dens and the foc'sle of the HMS Bounty. A rat hole whose only redeeming feature lay in the fact that the wardroom always knew where the 'usual suspects' were camped out and could be rounded up. On Requin, it was known to anyone above Ensign as the 'Headache Factory'.

To say the Alley was an untamed dump would be a master stroke of understatement. If they had not invented Aqua Velva, we couldn't have stood ourselves. After more than two weeks of no showers... You know, the point where you could throw your socks at the goat locker curtains and they would stick. If it wasn't for Aqua Velva and Lucky Tiger hair tonic, we would have been overcome by the smell.

No human beings should live like we did. I have no idea what the size of the accommodations were that they gave Jeffrey Dahmer, but you can bet your fanny it was a helluva lot more than we had in the Alley. It was so small, the gahdam roaches stood four on and eight off.

You could get anything in the Alley. The Alley was the control point for contraband, a stash of sea store smokes that never ran dry, a library of pornographic and well worn cowboy paperbacks that the Library of Congress envied, and an award winning reel of Road Runner cartoons stolen from 16mm sea print films and spliced together into a two hour display of spectacular stupidity. the 'After Battery Road Runner Extravaganza' was beyond the shadow of a doubt, the best kept secret of the entire Cold War. Over several years, dozens of non rated members of our submersible forces afloat participated in a project to surgically remove all visual evidence of Mr. Beep Beep and Mr. Coyote from as many sea flicks as came aboard and assemble them into what became known as the 'Big Mother'. You could run a full charge on both batteries in less time than it took to run the Big Mother.

The only rule was the OD must be fully copped out before Big Mother could leave her secure perch in the after battery ventilation lines. Death would have been one of the lesser penalties that would have been paid by any sonuvabitch revealing the existence of Big Mother... The Alley Mafia was the all knowing, all powerful enforcer of the highly regarded legal system, known as the 'Code of no Crow'. Anyone who crossed that invisible division point and entered the Kingdom of the Crow, became instantly socially unacceptable, forfeited his right of association and was evicted from all of the side lockers and other real property he had managed to homestead, weedle or otherwise occupy in the land of nonsense and rarely condoned activity. To divulge the details of anything going on in the Alley was an invitation to have the major element of one's manhood promptly nailed to a line locker lid.

I don't want to convey the impression it was 'Eat or be Eaten' in the Alley... Far from it. The Alley was a benevolent society formed for the self protection of the lowest forms of submarine life... The Cub Scout den for the kids from the other side of the tracks... Like a lepor colony where you went to comiserate with your fellow lepors and fantasize about Chief Petty Officers being eaten by sea life with big teeth.

We took care of our own. I was once in Portsmouth Naval Hospital following the removal of my appendix... Three inmates of the Alley made it past 30 ferret-eyed nurses, carrying a beautiful vase of daffodils resting nicely in two quarts of draft beer. We called them shipmates, one of the most honored and dearly earned terms in the English language. I would draw my last dime out of the bank to buy an airline ticket to go pump a pint of blood for any sonuvabitch who ever called me 'shipmate'. All you fellow bubbleheads really understand what I mean.

I remember one night, we pulled in from God knows where... Doing ping time for Navy pilots who dropped PDCs (practice depth charges) on us and made sleeping damn near impossible.

It was late when we secured the boat and the married guys got stand-bys out of all the single guys... Another day in Paradise.

After the charge, the OD had a cup of coffee, bid us a pleasant evening and turned in for the night.

"Gentlemen, the OD has just planted the idea that we have a pleasant evening..."

We then decided our idea of a pleasant evening called for pooled resources and cold beer next to the screw guards. We were simple people who enjoyed simple pleasures... On E-3 pay, the simpler the cheaper.

We pooled resources, turned over the pilfered dog-eared community controlled liberty card and sent the guy who lost the coin flip, for beer.

In Norfolk, there was a locally brewed product known as 'Banner Beer'. It came in short brown bottles or cans, with a label showing a waving blue pennant with 'Banner Beer' in big white letters. The label went on to say that Banner Beer was a "Masterful representation of the Brewer's Art". What Banner actually was, was living proof that man had mastered the art of bottling fermented sheep dip and selling it for a dollar thirty a six pack.

The beer arrived... We had combed our lockers for floating change resulting in enough for 3 six packs. We knew the drill... Drag a CO2 extinguisher topside to cool the cans... Put the loose cans in a weighted laundry bag that could be deep sixed if the duty OD woke up in the middle of a Rita Hayworth dream and decided to have a smoke topside. Experience indicated that our wardroom contained no commissioned personnel so bent on ass chewing opportunities that they would scuba dive for evidence. We never considered the question that would be posed by six shirtless men congregated around an obviously recently discharged fire extinguisher.

There we were, the Navy's finest... Sucking suds with a million stars overhead. Some animal speaks, "Gentlemen, I give you a beautiful night..." Beautiful night Hell, maybe an acceptable moment. My idea of a 'beautiful night' ain't got nothin' to do with drinking cheap beer, with a bunch of ugly bastards, at a time of night when the only people running around are burglars and whores.

That was the closest we ever got to. "I love you guys..." But it speaks volumes for the lads who rode boats and lived the legend of the final days of the diesel boat Navy.

Master Chiefs by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Remember those old raggedy-ass Master Chiefs? One of those fellows who bunked in the goat locker, forward of the alley... One of those guys who 'buttpolished' the

messdeck benches and drank coffee during an 'All hands, turn to...' And from time to time, moved about to check on the after battery slaves to make sure:

(A) They were not parked on an after battery head, reading a dog-eared Playboy.

(B) They had not found a dark upper bunk in the forward room and sacked out.

(C) Had not hidden in the pump room, sonar shack or dry stores room.

They were one of the old 'Dick Tracys', who knew that the great unwashed animal pack was prone to hide bottles of illegal consumables in the maneuvering room cubicle, outboard engines one and two, behind the Navol monitor, and in the pit log well.

Being a Master Chief is a form of cannibalism... You return to make meals out of your own kind. After battery rats hear stories like,

"Hell, you should'a known ol' Dutch back in '52... We rode the USS Charley Tuna out of San Diego... Back then, the sonuvabitch was half nuts. One night, we were tossing off shots of Tequila and some fellow called ol' Dutch a sewerpipe sailor and Dutch bounced him off a cinderblock wall and put him through a plate glass window..."

Dutch? The Dutch we knew drank a lot of coffee... Was the guy the exec sent to talk to you after you and two other members of the deck force had gone on liberty, ran out of money, climbed palm trees and peed on the Key West cop when invited to return to Earth.

The Dutch we knew could not have been related to the fellow who in 1955, rode down the main street of a village in Venezuela, buck naked on the back of a dairy cow, singing "*I'm back in the saddle again...*" They may have looked a lot alike but there was no way they could have been kin.

No sir, they remove all the hell raising genes from you before they make you a Master Chief.

But they are good folks to know when the local constabulary delivers you to the quarterdeck in a straw hat, your skivvies and flip flops, and you can't remember which house of horizontal refreshment you left your whites hanging up in... And you need an advocate to translate your gibberish into some kind of believable bullshit the exec will buy.

Master Chief Petty Officers... Make that submarine qualified Master Chief Petty Officers, can turn bullshit into gold at a rate that would even amaze Bill Clinton. That's basically what they do.

One of the questions on the Master Chief's exam reads:

"You are in Guam... You are called to a local warehouse where you find five non rated members of your crew holding off twenty members of the Air Force police with a high pressure fire hose. How do you convince the Air Force major that what these lads are engaged in, is in the best interest of the security of the United States?"

You have two minutes. You cannot use mind altering drugs or hand puppets.

When you're out, you look back and remember the times you were dead ass broke and some raggedy-assed Chief slipped you enough for a couple of pitchers at Bells. Times when the cab driver dumped you next to a salvage air connection forward of the conning tower fairwater and the Chief paid him... Told you what an idiot you were... Walked you aft and dumped you down the after battery hatch.

If God had not created CPOs, the guys in Hogan's Alley would have been forced to invent them. Many times, the only thing between you and 'Walking the Plank' was a Chief who had taken a buck naked ride on a bovine creature long ago in the South Atlantic.

My book is going to be titled: Two Years in the Shears. Bullshit sea stories from one of the last after battery rats.

Or

The Man Who Only Saw a Good Conduct Medal in a Surplus Store Window.

Or

Thelma Wouldn't Have Signed Monica Lewinsky's Qual Card

Sly Fox by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

When you refer to *Sly Fox*, do you mean that fine bordeaux wine... That remarkable vintage... The rage of the 1959 Paris Wine Exhibition? Or are you referring to that nasty stuff in a green glass bottle with a grey fox on a purple label... That stuff that looked like it was fermented in a bilge strainer, had all the sophistication of 'Johnson's No-Roach', and when dribbled all over a set of whites, made you look like the Shroud of Turin with legs.



If anyone asks you about the most terrible thing devised during the Cold War, take *Sly Fox* for 500.

Topside Watch

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The loneliest job in the world... Night topside



watch... Outboard boat, after nest, pier 22, DES SUB piers.

I may possibly hold the SUBLANT record for standing topside watches. If there was a TopsideWatchman's rate, I could have skipped from E-3 to E-6 immediately. I was what you would call, the consummate topside watch. My statue was the first erected in the Topside Watch Hall of Fame. The inscription reads, "Inventor of Kiwi Golf."

What is Kiwi golf? It is played at night... Topside... 12 to 4 watch. You take an empty Kiwi shoe polish can ... Start at the fwd. capstan and kick the can from bow to stern, using the salvage air connection deck plates as the holes... All holes being par three, except where you had to get it around the conning tower fairwater... That was the par ten hole. Arguments as to number of penalty strokes for a Kiwi over the side or slipping into the superstructure were never decided, so I guess Kiwi golf still has no hard and fast rules.

There were a million diversions to keep you from going nuts in the middle of the night. You could talk to the topside watch on the boat tied up next to yours. Invariably, he was from Fork-in-the-Road, Minnesota and would explain things like, if you don't milk lady cows often enough they would explode, and all the stuff that could go wrong with a hay baler. The closest I'd been to a cow was the third row in a Randolph Scott movie, so I never could follow the complicated stuff.

You could buy a pellet gun and fast draw on pier rats. This is a lot of fun until the eagle-eyed guys on the Orion quarterdeck sent the duty tattletale down to tell your O. D. that the man standing topside watch was "Monkeying with his pistol...". This brought about a midnight discussion where it was unilaterally decided that since perceptions being what they were and the negligible value of pier rat pelts, I should stop and devote more time to checking lines and keeping desperados from crossing our brow.

I never, on daylight watch, put Tobasco or Texas Pete hot sauce in rolls and toss them to seagulls... I never pitched Alka Seltzer tablets to the gulls... I did however, join a bunch of fellow mates and throw Saltine crackers in the air to encourage sea fowl to congregate in circles large enough to rain poop on the crew of the Redfin, gathered topside, in dress canvas for a ship's company photo. God has since forgiven me to the point that I am no longer liable for cleaning bills.

In the winter, they put a doghouse on the boat to protect you from the elements... What elements? The things were made out of plywood so thin you could damn near see through it, but it was too heavy to cut leg holes in the floor so you could carry it with you when you checked your mooring lines. We used to say that guard shacks were SUBRON SIX's way to save coffin money when burying frozen topside watches. They secretly buried frozen topside watches and paved over them... Thus explaining all that "Officer Only" parking at DES SUB piers. You couldn't fool us.

Who invented the gahdam peacoat, anyway? Probably some light in the loafers' avant-garde designer. They weren't long enough... You got chewed out for putting your hands

in the pockets, which were so high and shallow that your arms looked like rigged out bow planes. They had a little ice cold chain sewn in to the collar that would give you weird neck sensations... And when it rained, they absorbed 20 gallons of water with no drips. Once wet, you stunk like sheep and had gained 35 lbs., then your ankles broke.

To lifers, the peacoat was an almost religious vestment. To bad mouth the peacoat was to trash Naval tradition... To denigrate those men of the deep water service who had gone before... Down to the sea in ships, braving danger to pass on the fine traditions that we unworthy useless idiots failed to appreciate. That of course was news to us, we just thought they hung around bus stations and amused themselves saying, "Hey sailor, get those hands out of those pockets!"

Everything that came aboard, passed the topside watch, including drunks and doughnuts. Drunken boat sailors can do amazing things and be extremely entertaining if you can convince them to stay out of the water and keep their clothes on.

Signing for doughnuts could make you power drunk. Having a gun with authorization to shoot thieves and twelve dozen doughnuts is a lesson in submarine behavior known only to topside watches and painted ladies. "If you have what a boat sailor wants... And you give it to him... When he's finished, he'll move on and never look back." Fickle fellows. When your popularity is directly tied to doughnut availability... It ain't love.

I think they replaced topside watches with an 800 number and sold all the dogshacks for Virginia Beach vacation bungalows.

It all happened long ago and far away in that strange and exotic world just off Hampton Blvd... The land of DES SUB piers. We were young... No money... No sense... And aberrant human behavior was a virtue in our line of work.

The Slush Fund by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Slush funds are illegal. They are forbidden by regulation and frowned upon by all the wise people who never got caught a thousand miles from any source of cash... Dead broke in weird places where folks talk funny and don't give away beer, barbequed monkey strips and physical affection for free.

There are no established reputable banking institutions doing business in the North Atlantic. No ATM machines... No floating drive-in windows... And no plastic credit cards issued by Father Neptune and his mermaid tellers. No sir... When you're broke, you're flat out of everything but gold dental work. This malady was exclusive to enlisted elements - never saw officers running around trying to scare up enough to float a couple buckets of suds.

Our disbursing office was on the tender, USS Orion (AS-18). In the late '50s, early '60s, the Orion went to sea about as often as Mother Teresa went to the Kentucky Derby. We

got paid from Orion... Our pay records rested in some secret hole on 'Mother Onion,' watched over by a group of lead-assed, shore duty shoemaker's elves who were never around when you were far from home, dead sober, hungry, and wanting to lay alongside something wearing a skirt.

So, the Great Sea Daddy of us all looked down from the sky and said, "This is not good."

So, He bestowed upon his subsurface enlisted elements, the idea for the creation of a kind of Saltwater Savings and Loan... He said,

"When you are paid, select one among you to pass, among his fellow shipmates with a beat-up cigar box, and taketh from each a Fin... An Old Abe... A Fiver... five bucks. Do not telleth the FDIC, bank regulators or the wardroom. This reserve will provide comfort in times when you are far from the loafers who are camping on the Orion, shuffling your pay records, and you wish to imbibe in distilled spirits, commingle with exotic females, or get back into a poker game in the maneuvering room."

"Money can be obtained at the rate of 'Get five - return six', 'Get ten - return twelve'" It was simple. You could explain it to a trained ape (and many times we had to).

It was further understood that at times, red-blooded American bluejackets found themselves in circumstances requiring the payment of bail, fines, bribes, or compensatory damages. The Saltwater Savings and Loan was prepared to meet such needs once validated by a quasi-board of directors resembling the 'Hole-in-the-Wall' gang.

The price for stupid behavior was an allotment against down line earnings known in the colorful parlance of forces afloat as "Pulling a Dead Horse."

Your author once had the need to seek such assistance.

In high school, they teach you a whole lot of junk you never use... And leave out a lot of stuff that would really come in handy. For example, I took two years of high school French... Two years with a nice looking redhead, with a high-powered, attention-diverting bust line. In those two years, I never learned the French words for "fuel hose" or "Which one of you little frog sonuvabitches stole our heaving lines?"

In history, nobody said that following our separation from England, the British said, "We'll show those idiotic Americans... We'll drive backwards... Switch sides of the road... Someday we'll get some idiot from east Tennessee off a submarine tied up in Bermuda. This moron will rent a motor bike after wrapping himself around three rum & cokes. Then this idiot will think since he has recently qualified, he has the world by the short curlies and shoves off in the 'hell bent' mode.

Shortly thereafter, this simpleton will meet a lorry (Brit-speak for 'truck') and they will be on a steady bearing rate... Sharing the same side of the road, closing in rapid fashion.

To avoid a collision, Mr. 'Ain't I Smart' alters course and detours through what turns out to be a flowerbed of rare botanical treasures and a lawn dance at the Princess Hotel. To avoid ladies in expensive dresses, men in formal jackets, and a group of clowns playing musical instruments, he leans on his motorbike, that falls over and stays with him for a forty foot slide through plush three inch high grass.

While Mr. E-3 is standing there trying to figure out if a grass stain that starts at your ankle and ends at your shoulder would be noticed by the SPs, a little car arrives... One of those cars that you see at the circus, where the doors open and thirty clowns get out.

These little guys looked like they had escaped from the top of a seven-year-old's birthday cake... White knee socks... Shorts... And silly looking white helmets with a brass flagpole spike bolted to the top.

They hopped up on me and beat me silly with little league bats. I must've forgot the "You are America's Naval ambassadors" speech the exec gave us. Unfortunately, I said something that, had I taken the time to think about it, would have been anatomically impossible for Queen Elizabeth to do to herself... More little league bats.

Well, the Saltwater Savings and Loan saved me after I mortgaged my soul. It had to be the finest insurance policy an after battery rat ever had.

Every now and then, we declared ourselves a dividend from the surplus that built up in the cigar box, and invested it in a ship's party or beer ball game. No bank I ever stuffed my money in since has thrown me a drunken bash. It was a bank where bread cast upon the water came back ten fold in security and good times.

They don't have slush funds on nuke boats... Don't need 'em... Each man has a financial advisor located next to the Chase-Manhattan compartment. As I understand it, all the rolls of head paper come with preprinted alternating auto and home loan forms.

So kiddies, THAT is a slush fund. Underwater finance in days long ago when wild men went to sea in soon-to-be junkyard iron. Always remember though, slush funds were the best illegal things that sailors ever created.

We Were a Different Bunch by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I remember a retired four-striper asking me one time, over late afternoon patio drinks,

"One thing I never understood about you lads in the submarine force... You were constantly at the center of damn near every 'dust up' and weird stunt involving in-port naval personnel."

He went on to relate a personal experience. While serving in some liaison role with Spanish Naval forces, he and his lovely wife Anna Marie attended a bullfight. Late in the afternoon, a gentleman dressed only in dog tags, skivvy shorts and an inverted white hat, leaped into the ring... Yelled, "Hey, POT ROAST!" and did a strange boogaloo in front of a confused bull until the Spanish constabulary forces carted him off.

"What did that accomplish? What do you think made him do it?"

I gave him the 'This is probably what you want to hear' bullshit and went on.

Why did we do that kind of stuff? Blame the selection process.

The general population of naval forces contains the full spectrum of humanity... A cross-section of middle America. Running from the exceptionally bright to the walking brain dead. In the middle of this seething caldron of raw, unvarnished manhood, a call went out for volunteers for the United States Submarine Service.

Prior to this 'Come forth, you adventurous devils' call, there was a lot of 'Most of you ain't got the cajones' talk, and 'We only take the best' bullshit. This was a form of natural selection... You had to be or desire to be, something different to hop in that trick bag.

Next, they packaged up this band of 'Have no idea what they've gotten into' idiots and sent them to New London.

I have no idea what was involved in the New London selection process... Absolutely no idea what those strange practitioners of hocus-pocus did, or wanted to accomplish. The net affect of this process was to filter out everyone but the devious, the wild, the class clown, and the 'Wait 'til they get a load of me' lunatic... All having a good grasp of mechanics, physics, common sense, logical reasoning, and a sense of humor. By some major miracle, the process magically located men who could live together in close proximity... Like a fraternity moving into a construction site portable john.

Once the process implanted the basic knowledge, weeded out the sick, lame, lazy, and the 'What'n th' hell would I want to live like this for?' crowd, and made sure you weren't a known carrier of some exotic tropical drop dead virus, they packed you off to various obsolete contraptions located up and down the coast.

Like being born, God and BUPERS just assign you to a family. When you arrive, you are just another orphan with a sea bag, dumped on the doorstep of your new home.

When you dump your gear on the brow and hand your orders to the topside watch, another subtle selection process begins. The deck force sees fresh talent... The messcook, relief! The COB, another pain-in-the-butt kid.

In three months, if you're not linked up with all the lads standing topside, in a lifetime cement job relationship, you're probably moving to a new address. Once you had been

accepted and baptized with a nickname, you began to notice attitudinal and behavioral changes. You find that the Naval establishment makes allowances and allows a degree of latitude not given the rest of the fleet, supposedly to compensate for living compressed in a sardine tin... And knowing the type of lads that successfully negotiate the selection process, they constantly expand the allowances and latitude envelope, and plumb the depths of naval forgiveness.

The four-striper went on...

"Hell, you won't believe this... When the Spanish police turned this damn near nude idiot over to the duty officer, the corpsman said it was a touch of sunstroke and turned him into his rack. The exec apologized to the caribineri and that was it... If that SOB had been a lad off my ship, I would have roasted that sonuvabitch alive." I rest my case.

There were times we didn't understand each other. If you were an East Coast smoke boat sailor, you will remember Maggie's. Maggie's house of carnal delights. Three girls - \$100 and Maggie, God bless her, would hold your I.D. and liberty card to ensure gentlemanly conduct. Maggie's was highly respected institution. I once saw a Connecticut state troopers hat hanging on a hook in Maggie's parlor.

"Jeezus Maggie, where'n the hell did THAT come from?"

"Oh rats, Bill left his hat here again... He'll be back, darlin'..."

I said to myself, if a Connecticut state trooper comes in, I'm going out a window.

One night, there was a sailor out of SUBRON 8 sitting in Maggie's parlor. I said,

"Hey cowboy, what're you gettin' tonight?"

"Bed and clean sheets..."

"Bed and clean sheets? Why a bed and sheets?"

"Been out... Was out five weeks... Known Maggie a long time. If we come in and Maggie is having a slow night, she lets me shower and rack out for ten bucks. On an active night, Peggy takes me to her place when she gets off. Maggies' kinda like my mom..."

I never figured that guy out.

Last time I visited Maggies was '62... Left an I.D. bracelet I got for high school graduation, hanging on a toothbrush holder in room 2. Never went back.

If you never had breakfast, coffee, a hot shower, and a 6AM roll in the hay at Maggies home for boat sailors, you missed one of the great cultural experiences of Naval service. Breakfast at Maggies put a smile on your face at morning quarters. Lorine...

Dusty... Or Lorine & Dusty... 'Breakfast of Champions', and one of the primary reasons we won the Cold War. Ivan had Katrinka and Natasha... Wool bloomers, vodka breath, all packed in a canvas nightie...

We won.

Running Mates by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Submarine sailors' pair up like the animals on the Ark. I'm sure psychologists would give you some stem-winding, mind jamming explanation but when you boiled all the bullshit out of it, it would come down to; Everything you did took two sets of hands, you often needed someone to either keep you from doing totally stupid stuff, to help you do totally stupid stuff, or to throw you a rope and haul your butt back when you were up to your ears in hot water.

Sea stories are a two-way street... It takes a teller and someone with ears. I had the best running mate a sailor ever had... Adrian Stuke.

He came from Quincy Illinois. When Mrs. Stuke gave birth to Adrian, she tied a knot in the tail of mankind no one has been able to untie. For over half a century, Adrian Stuke has had life in a hammerlock.

Stuke and I were in the same watch section, deck force, lived in Hogan's Alley, and shared enough pitchers at Bells we could have floated a Texaco tanker. I'm no twinkle toes about to pop out of the fairy locker, but I loved him then and still do. He was, and still is, the closest pal and best thing silver dolphins came with.

Adrian Stuke was, going away, an unvarnished nut... An all-American red-blooded after battery rat. In combination, we could stir up more stupidity and generate more hell in five minutes than any other two idiots in the entire Navy. Every investigation into the source of particular nonsense that broke out on Requin began with the COB or exec having a conversation with us. We could have been 500 miles away from the action but somehow everyone knew we had a hand in it. We admitted to stuff we knew absolutely nothing about simply to maintain our perfect record and squadron-wide reputation.

Just to give you some idea of how close we are, I am in his will... If he checks in to the Great Receiving Station in the Sky before I do, he's leaving me all the photos of Janie in a bikini - all except the cellophane thong series.

He was the best stern planesman that ever lived. When we had the planes, the boat was as level as a pool table. If God and St. Peter sat down and picked the all time best submarine crew, Stuke would be on stern planes. According to Stuke, I would get the bow planes if every boat sailor who ever manned them declined, and Zip, the blind monkey got run over by a truck... You always hurt the one you love...

Once we were busting our butts painting topside using 225 air, paint pots, and the worst collection of sprayers that existed in the whole world. We were half stupid breathing MEK (Methyl Ethyl Keytone) and it was hotter than the hubs of hell. We were getting more paint on each other than we were getting on the superstructure.

A group of non-producers had gathered on the deck railing on the Orion. After a half-hour of pointing, laughing and wise-ass comments, we decided that some kind of response was in order.

We found a large cardboard breadbox and cut out a four-foot hand. We taped the hand to the top of our attack scope and tied 21 thread shot line to three of the fingers. We tied the lines together and ran the scope up so we could use the lines like puppet strings and give the lads on 'Mother Onion' the single finger salute. It was working great. We then tied the lines to a pad eye on the bridge so we could run the scope up and down... As the scope rose to maximum extension, the fingers would be pulled down leaving only the index finger pointing to the sky. For the better part of ten minutes we were enjoying life running the scope up and down, giving Orion the bird. We were congratulating ourselves and thinking how clever we were.

Then the exec appeared and treated us to an impassioned discourse that included warship dignity, naval usage and misguided playground mentality. The guys on the Orion gave us hell as the exec supervised the removal of our improvised recognition signal.

One time, we were at sea on Christmas Eve and everyone's tail was dragging. The entire crew was moping around with that "My dog just died" look.

Stuke goes into the radio shack and gets a bunch of ALL NAV radio messages the big cheese shore duty guys send out to the armed forces overseas... Meaningless obligatory horsecrap.

"Okay guys, here's one from COMSUBLANT... 'Wish I could be with you tonight'... Can you imagine how gahdam ugly your wife would have to be to want to be out here on this stinking contraption rather than wrinkling up mama's nightie?"

"Here's one... Secretary of the Navy... Five bucks to anyone who knows the sonuvabitch's name... I figured... Anyway, he states, 'Wish I could enjoy Christmas with you fine men'... Fine men, aye... He obviously doesn't know that Tom Brennen joined the Navy... After all that money the Navy shelled out putting Brennen's photo in all the recruiting offices with 'Don't let this bastard in the U.S. Navy', you slipped by Tom... This idiot wants to eat with us... Must be queer for turkey roll, powdered potatoes and bug juice..."

"Here's one for you, Dex... Personal greetings from the president... It's personal... It reads, 'Don't let the rest of the crew know but the Commander in Chief is very aware that Dex Armstrong is between him and all the naval forces of evil... And that your

devoted service allows him to go to bed knowing the world is safe for democracy and all one and two way trash is being handled in a truly professional manner..."

He, Adrian Stuke, gave us the ability to laugh at ourselves. He found the pearl in every cow pie, the diamonds in every hog wallow... He was my running mate.

He finished his enlistment, collected his gear, gave me a hug and shoved off. For several years, he was the Lone Ranger, the Cisco Kid and Butch Cassidy... I was Tonto, Poncho and the Sundance Kid. We rode together, swung from limb to limb together and tap danced out of scrapes together. I missed him with that same feeling you get when your sandbox pal had the chicken pox.

There were no more peaceful nights where we would stand aft by the screw guards catching a smoke and Stuke would say,

"Dex, it's too damn quiet tonight... Let's come up with something, go below and stir 'em up... You know, give a chief a heart attack or something..."

He sure left a hole in the rat gang.

Today there is research being conducted in some of our major universities in an attempt to find out how a lovely girl like Janie can live under the same roof with Stuke and survive. It may be the miracle of our age.

Hampton Blvd. by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

To all East Coast sailors, Norfolk was 'Shit City.' Rumor has it that during World War II the fine citizens of that fair city put signs on their lawns that read, "SAILORS AND DOGS KEEP OFF THE GRASS." Next to the Red Cross making front line GIs pay for coffee and doughnuts they should have given away, the stories about Norfolk come in a well deserved second. The best way to see Norfolk was through a rear view mirror.

Norfolk created a sinkhole called East Main Street. No place on earth was a bigger dump. It was wall to wall beer joints and establishments designed specifically to separate sailors from their money. It was a municipal embarrassment and they shut it down.

It needs to be said that without the Navy payroll, Norfolk would have been just another seedy seaport... The neat stuff that Norfolk has today got built with bluejacket bucks.

The police force that spent most of their time hassling sailors turned a blind eye to gambling, gouging storekeepers, whores, motels who rented the same room four times a night, and the crooks who drove cabs. Norfolk was a corrupt hole... A festering pus pit on the East Coast... It WAS 'Shit City.'

The city fathers through a clever zoning plan, closed down the open sore of East Main Street. This forced the center of action to Hampton Blvd. A case of moving the ticks to the dog.

Hampton Blvd. became a Mecca of beer joints, navy gear stores, tailor shops, and greasy spoons. They sold everything a sailor wanted and set up locker clubs to store your junk. It was a land beyond health codes and consumer protection.

They had clothing stores who must have purchased their entire inventory straight off the seconds' rack at the Ringling Brothers outlet. I once saw a sailor come out of Bells Naval Tailors wearing an avocado-colored sports coat with metallic threads woven into it. Jeezus, they would have laughed the guy out of a Ubangi class reunion.

There was a motto engraved in the hearts of all shopkeepers on Hampton Blvd... "You can sell dog doo doo to a sailor on payday..." And they did. Sailors with good taste (I wasn't one and never met one) were a statistical element right behind pregnant nuns.

They sold godawful silk pillows with fringe all around the edges. They also had every imaginable kind of brass, plastic and ceramic ships and anchors with "FROM YOUR SAILOR IN NORFOLK VIRGINIA" printed on them. I figured any mother who put one of those ugly sonuvabitches out where anyone could see it, must have REALLY loved her son, or was blind.

There were kids running around with an open top tin can suspended on a string around their necks and a wood box... In the tin can they had a couple cans of black Kiwi or Lincoln shoe polish and a buff rag... The box held a shoe brush.

"Hey sailor... One fine shine... One thin dime..."

Adrian Stuke brought back this wonderful memory in a recent phone call.

"One fine shine... One thin dime," a clean white hat, fresh pressed blues, dolphins, money in your pockets for a couple of pitchers of beer, eight Slim Jims... It didn't get any better than that... It never did.

Hampton Blvd. was the home of the Second Fleet. Tincan sailors had a bar... Airdales had a bar... All the other skimmers had bars... SUBRON SIX had Bells. Bells was a hole. It had beat up furniture, a beat up pool table, a juke box and a men's room where on a heavy duty drinking night, grown men have been known to pee directly down the floor drain. It was a hole all right, but it was OUR hole. Bells was the nest we feathered... Hell, we were young single guys and had no other place to go.

When a decent girl left home, the last thing a Norfolk dad said was, "Darling, stay away from sailors and don't go anywhere near Hampton Blvd." So, if you wanted female companionship, you most likely had to pay for it. One way or the other, you paid... And at the pay rate in those days, the product was a little ragged around the edges.

Our story will never show up on the screen at your local movie house. We should be thankful in a lot of ways... Why? Because no one who wasn't there could get it right.

Confession is a Rotten Job by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

When old boat sailors get together, it doesn't take long for conversation to degenerate into what valve did what... The "Can you name the gin mill?" game... "Whatever happened to old Whatzisname?..." "You remember the barmaid with the big gazongas who ran around with that nutso radioman off the Kittywake?" Pier numbers... Phone numbers... Hull numbers.

At some point, some sonuvabitch tells the first lie... That's it. The starting pistol for major "Can you top this" bullshit. Amateurs and featherweights fall out early.

Like the preliminary fights, it all leads up to the main event when guys like RamJet swim out and eat the little fish (If anyone tops the 'Eat the Flowers', there's gotta be a Pulitzer prize in it). I told my bride of going on 35 years that in the wonderful world of sea stories, RamJet is a major league crown contender. Love his stuff... Brings back really great memories... The priceless stuff that lives in the dark corner of your memory locker (According to my daughter, a helluva lot of it should stay in a dark place and never see the light of day).

Rudyard Kipling in his poem *Tommy*, says it best... Forgive me if it's not exactly right;

"... And if at times our conduct isn't all your fancy paints, remember single men in barracks don't turn into plaster saints."

That's true. At the pay rate of nonrated men in the late 50s and early 60s, nobody should be too damn surprised that we didn't devote a lot of time to opera, polo, golf, and downhill skiing. We also never developed a proper appreciation of fine French wines, classical art and classical music, unless you consider screw cap Italian Swiss Colony Silver Satin, a Budweiser nekkit lady calendar, and Ernest Tubb and Marty Robbins songs to qualify.

You could get into most places on Hampton Boulevard without white tie and tails. Very few debutante balls were held at Bells... And you didn't have to push your way through paparazzi to get at Thelma.

Having to explain your actions at 19, forty years later to daughters, is the damnedest delayed action fuse on the planet.

"You mean you did this stuff? The man who told our boyfriends they would be boiled and eaten if they so much as hinted at possible monkey business?"

Same guy... Not that he matured a helluva lot. It's just that the research he did while serving with SUBRON SIX brought him face to face with the entire spectrum of monkey business. So young ladies, your dad knows monkey business up close and personal... Engaged in some himself... Dabbled shall we say, in the monkey business trade. Someone once said, "Ain't nothin' any more righteous than a reformed whore..."

How do you tell someone who stayed home, married his high school squeeze, was a vestryman at church, and was the local chairman of the United Givers Fund, that we were really good guys? We didn't spend a lot of time at Martha Stewart's house, but we were double volunteers and served our country... Paid our dues and earned the right to enter a voting booth without dark glasses and a rubber nose.

When the boys and girls of the anti-war hippie days were acting like traitors and idiots, we were out there punching holes in the ocean. I missed whatever it was the Beatles did... I missed John Glen's trip into space... Somewhere Indo-China became Viet-Nam... Y. A. Tittle retired... NFL teams appeared out of nowhere... They quit making Ipana toothpaste and Old Gold cigarettes... Telephone calls went from a dime to fifteen cents... Some genius invented the birth control pill and Jack Parr disappeared. Just part of the price submarine sailors and maximum security convicts pay... Isolation from planetary influence allows you to call yourself an American dues payer. Everyone who wore Dolphins can be damn proud of that.

All this chest pounding over 'Winning the Cold War' is probably more of that hocus-pocus, 'Now you see it, now you don't' foreign policy horse manure. But, one thing we CAN say, "On our watch, no foreign rascals Jap-slapped us with a gahdam sneak attack and we kept the free world safe enough that all our recently graduated high school pals had to worry about were blouse buttons and three-hook bras at the Drive-In.

Being a boat sailor wasn't easy. Just being accepted by the men who made up the force was an honor in itself. To earn Dolphins made a fellow feel he'd accomplished something that set him apart from the main body of the bluejacket herd.

Someone once said, "Dex, you ought to get down on your knees and thank God for putting you in the boat service because horsefly, if the Lord had parked your butt in the surface navy, you'd still be looking out of metal mesh at Portsmouth." Maybe a little overstated, but undoubtedly contains elements of truth.

It is a blessing to once again find men I can talk to, who understands and gives a damn. You spend all that time learning the boat... The lingo... The pride... The comradeship... And then you leave and wander around in that great sea of 'Who gives a damn?' humanity with no one to talk to. Kind of like spending six years learning conversational Eskimo then moving to Mesa, Arizona.

Thanks for allowing me to keep building this treehouse, so we can hold 'NO GIRLS ALLOWED' meetings, tell socially unacceptable recounting of past deeds and chase the fireflies of our better days through diesel exhaust smoke and sea spray.

Trying to write about life in the smoke boat service in Sunday school language makes about as much sense as applying Oil-of-Olay to an iguana's ass.

We're getting fewer and fewer, like Model 'A' Fords... They aren't making the damn things anymore so every time you lose one, the heard gets thinner by one.

A lot of you have asked where to send contributions to the non-profit fund, to buy Ray Stone a one-way ticket to East Jeezus, New Zealand... No need for more contributions, money has been pouring in... Tickets have been purchased and we are presently trying to obtain a Tasmanian Devil-proof, steel cable reinforced canvas bag for Ray.

Who writes this inane garbage?

Remembering Ralph by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In a recent phone conversation with Bob Garlock, the Father of the USS Requin Reunion Program, I was asked to recount a tale. Bob Garlock lost his brother, Mark 'Tink' Garlock, a fine Requin shipmate, to a shipboard accident in 1962. In Tink's memory, Bob began a labor of love that has lasted many years. His mission has been to locate every officer and crewmember that ever served aboard Requin. He means any man who rode her from 1945 to 1970... The expense in computer time, phone bills and personal time must have reached astronomical proportions. It has become a priceless gift and one that we are all indebted for.

Bob heard a story at the last reunion and has asked that I relate this one...

No one likes to chronicle his own stupidity. Anyone who reads this one will say, "What a bunch of idiots." Well, can't take issue with that. Next thing they would ask is, "Why the hell would they do it?"

The only answer I can give is "To prove we could." At nineteen, you do stuff simply to say you did it. No one tells you that you will have to own up to dumb stunts 40 years later. I guess it's the price you pay for youthful stupidity. In mitigation, I would like to say we pulled it off... Got away with it. Not that it makes the stunt any less idiotic or diminishes the potential embarrassment we could have caused the old man, the crew and the boat. This one isn't easy... If anyone but Bob Garlock had asked me to own up to this one, I would have told them to go pack sand.

It was '61 or '62... We pulled into Bermuda. If you've never been to 'Bermadoo', you didn't miss a whole helluva lot. The place is an island about the size of a Monopoly board. Everything in the place is priced for the tourist trade... The entire gross national product is tied to fleecing tourists. It's a place where rich people and honeymooners go to bask in the sun, drink rum and cokes and chase their womenfolk around \$200 a night hotel rooms. The last thing these clowns wanted was to be up to their armpits in bluejackets.

The population had a very short memory. They traded survival and protection in World War II for a 99 year U.S. base lease under the lend-lease program. Twenty seconds after Hitler's boys tossed in the towel, they had second thoughts and started whining. Whining is a major industry in Bermuda. If it hadn't been for U.S. forces afloat from 1941 to 1945, the fine folks of the little island would have to have eaten a helluva lot of fish or each other to survive. Everything they got came in by U.S. protected ships. They lived right smack in the middle of the U-boat feeding ground.

By the early '60s, the memory along with any lingering appreciation had faded to the point that the U.S. Navy was simply a blight that came by sea to soil the atmosphere of their cute little Lionel train set island.

The big honchos of the island worked out a deal with the permanent resident big cheese Naval officers to keep the number of migratory raghats off the streets of their fair sanctuary. If you came in late and the number of sailors allowed on the beach had hit the allotted quota, you couldn't get out the gate.

So they organized beer ballgames to occupy the attention of the men who wanted to clear snorkel air out of their lungs. You remember beer ballgames... An afternoon of drunks trying to hit a baseball and pee in the outdoors. Not a lot of fun but it killed time.

We had a kid named Johnny Robert Thorn. Young kid... His brother had been a well known UDT guy in World War II. Johnny's dream was to make the UDT... The kid had a damn near obsessive fascination with explosives and big-bang ordinance... Might have been a genetic defect peculiar to his family.

We were in the vicinity of the 30th. Inning... Those still on their feet were three sheets to the wind and the majority of the mob in the outfield were taking drunken siestas in the grass.

Somewhere around this time, fireman first Thorn shows up with a blue bomb. Not a real bomb, but an empty 500 lb. practice bomb casing. A thin-skinned, light sheetmetal canister in the shape of a bomb that had two pad eyes to fasten it to the bomb release mechanism on the wings of Navy aircraft. As it was explained to me, the Naval air guys filled these empty bomb casings with sand that gave them the approximate weight of a real bomb and allowed them to be dropped in practice. The sand would mark the targets since the thin skin would split open on impact and sand would spread out in the direction of travel.

Well, Johnny Robert turned up with this stupid practice bomb casing he found in an ordinance yard at the air base.

"What'n the hell do you expect to do with that, horsefly?"

"Dunno... It was jus' layin' around over there where airdales salvage stuff..."

"Just what we need... A gahdam bomb..."

"It's pretty neat... Think we could get it back to the boat?"

"The BOAT? Jeezus, how in the hell could we get that big monster back to the boat? Not to say what we'd do with the damn thing if by some miracle we made it back to the boat with the stupid thing... First, we'd have to get it past the guys at the fleet landing... Get it past the boat coxswain and the bow hook... Get it up the side of the tender... Cross the Orion quarterdeck... Haul it down to the lower brow... Cross over four boats and THEN, when we finally made it, figure out the purpose of all the effort and what to do with the sonuvabitch!!"

"Yeh, but wouldn't it be a hoot to pull it off?"

At this point, we began to consider actually hauling the thing back... The challenge and opportunity to pull one over on the quarterdeck bozos that were the guardians of 'mother Onion.' Remember, we were young, half in the bag from too much beer in the sun and we were prone to get into things on a lark that we wouldn't have touched with a pole extending well beyond ten feet had we thought about it for a sufficient period of time.

At some point, boat sailors like Stuke, Armstrong, Badertcher, and a Rontini regular, Mike Hemming (If I have named anyone undeserving of the dubious honor, accept my apologies... Chalk it up to the failing memory of a self-admitted fool and bullshit artist.) engage in like-minded activities using the same logical reasoning.

So, there we were... In a foreign land, in rapidly failing sunlight, half in the weeds, plotting an adventure in unacceptable behavior. Not that plotting unacceptable behavior was anything new to the inhabitants of Requin's after battery. You see, we instinctively knew that at some point we would grow up, become third class petty officers, and have our stupidity authorization permits revoked. Then would come responsible behavior... The price of leadership.

It was collectively decided... I use the word 'collectively' because I'll be damned if I am going to go down in history as being an instigator of any foolishness that followed... I would like to say I got caught up in the moment... Your honor...

We put a white hat and a sea jacket on the thing, and took it with us. The idea was to crowd around the damn thing, act drunker than we actually were and move along a predetermined route. We all agreed that at the point of discovery, we would fess up and take the heat as a team.

We made it to the small boat... We reached Orion and arrived at her quarterdeck. By the time we arrived at Orion, all of the returning Requin mob was in on the prank. We crossed the Orion quarterdeck in the fashion of a stampeding buffalo herd and a quarterback sneak... Thirty overactive major league drunks and Ralph the bomb. All the

J.G. wanted to do was get us the hell off his quarterdeck... We did. Thirty drunks and Ralph made it.

Getting across the boats in the nest was easy. It takes a lot to amaze and attract the attention of a submarine topside watch. Short of a bluejacket bringing a naked lady riding a zebra aboard, not much appeared out of place.

There we were, standing in the after battery mess deck... Sitting on the table - Ralph the practice bomb.

The exec came aft... Gave us an academy award contending lecture on risking the reputation of the boat with our constant propensity to nibble around the edges of court martial activity... He wanted to know why we did it... No one had an answer. Looking back though, there WAS an answer.

We were the tightest group of human beings in the world. We totally believed we could pull off anything... Together, we could do anything. We also had to manufacture our adventure. The movies, the TV shows, the books, and the recruiting hype made submarine duty appear exciting and adventurous. Peacetime boat service was as boring as watching goldfish mate. We did stuff... Sometimes, stupid stuff to prove we were alive. Nothing complex, however... Nineteen is too young for brain atrophy.

We took Ralph topside and threw him over the side next to the screw guards.

It was long ago... Too long to attempt to make sense out of it at this late date.

The same reason they selected us for the boats was the reason we did it. Normal human beings don't get dolphins.

I just hope when Ray Stone collects enough evidence to have us all locked up in the local nut house, I get to share a padded cell with Adrian Stuke.

Down Three by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

We've all been there. The third week of providing ping time to folks who obviously couldn't find a hippo in the trunk of a VW. There comes a point where you want the blind bastards to find you so bad, you want to bang on some metal object until the deaf sonarmen will hear you... Find you... And tell you to go home. At this point, the wild bunch in the alley start trying to figure out how the midwatch can turn on the red eye during the 2300 snorkel charge.

Three weeks down is the point where you begin to think teaching a cockroach to tap-dance is actually possible.

Grown men find they can actually argue over what sounds the animals on old Macdonald's' farm made... Where people devote time to questions like, "Who the hell was Hogan and why did they name the after half of the after battery outboard passageway after the sonuvabitch?" Then you find that guys like Sid Harrison and RamJet were actually related to Hogan.

Last week they had disclosed their linear bloodline descendency resulting from a little known illicit relationship between Joan of Arc and the Emperor of Japan (We will not speak of week four... The point where you actually believe that Sid Harrison actually wrote musical stuff under the name Beethoven and RamJet holds all the patents on fresh air). Week three women that looked like Eleanor Roosevelt started looking desirable. Books titled Trucker's Babe are transformed into great literature... And movies titled Riders of the High Chapparral become theatrical achievements... And beginning week three, you start to smell yourself.

By week three, you have held the Great Master Acey-Ducey Tournament, determined who the Planetary Grand Champion is, and had the customary ceremony. No milk... Bread's stale... Gamey dungarees.

The after battery is beginning to look like homeless people have moved in... All that's missing are grocery carts and refrigerator crates.

In the middle of chow, you have to pry two shipmates apart because one makes the simple observation that it's damn near impossible to find a virgin in Rhode Island... In the process we learn that the brother of a nun in a convent just outside of Newport is an ET on board.

The motor burns out on the alley fan.

Exec decides that crew is ripe for a practical factors lecture on the care and cleaning of the 45 cal. pistol. Crew votes overwhelmingly for the Sailors Beware film... That VD film that was always a big after battery crowd pleaser... The one where everyone swore it was made in his hometown and he had dated most of the cast. The exec cast his vote for the .45 film... Exec won... We watched a .45 get totally nekkit... Down to her operating slide and main spring. What an exciting experience. Nobody recognized anything from his hometown.

Three weeks out. We get Radio Moscow on RBO... The lovely ladies of the Mikarovgod tractor factories had a record breaking week and turned out 85 tractors. Boy, were we impressed. Lad from Nebraska who has intimate knowledge of both tractors and Nebraska girls explains how important it is to select for your life partner, a girl who has 'tractor ass'... Meaning that crease and cheek size must conform to a John Deere or International Harvester seat. Most of us had never heard of tractor ass... A little known fact we would have missed if we had gone to Penn State or Columbia University instead of SUBLANT U.

Third week out. Two men get in heated debate over what day it is. Engineman confesses that he has no idea what year it is... Only that it is somewhere in his third enlistment.

Messcook cuts his hand on sharp edge of a canned ham can. Mob collects to watch Doc Rohr sew him up. This serves as entertainment for the better part of 45 minutes. The surgical thread is purple... Crew tries to talk Doc into embroidering little violets in with the stitches for a great future sea story. Doc tells onlookers to go to hell and find some other way to waste their useless time.

Someone steals officer's Playboy magazine out of the forward room head. Nothing happens... Crew had hoped that some Scotland Yard criminal investigation would be launched. No one cares... No fun in it. Magazine is returned.

We get WCKY out of Cincinnati, Ohio. Man selling baby chicks and marigold seeds... Song by Mother Maybell and June Carter... We lose signal... Shit-kickers are broken hearted.

Cook serves canned mystery meat... We've been out too long. We know that tuna noodles will show up any day, then Sloppy Joe on rice. The hydraulic oil film floating on the coffee seems to be getting more colors... A veritable rainbow.

No mail... Couldn't somebody arrange an Orphan Annie drop? Isn't there one sonuvabitch in VP 45 who could get hold of our gahdam mail and drop it to us? All naval aviators are lazy bastards... Discussion follows...

Enginemen making fresh water... Jeezus it gets hot. After battery fan still busted. Exterior noise level monitors picking up internal noise... Turns out to be a can of peaches rolling back and forth in the waterway. Trash building up... Need a one-way surface dump.

Show movie backwards... It's not funny. Someone returns to subject of lack of virgins in Rhode Island... Nobody takes bait. Discussion turns to how come you never know who's winning stock car races but any Annapolis man in the forward battery can tell you who won the gahdam Army-Navy game five minutes after the fourth quarter? Is it true, did Fireball Roberts get killed?

What day is it? Some quartermaster must know... We've been down three weeks...

When's FINEX?

Marl "Tinker" Garlock by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I am an odd man to memorialize Tink Garlock, a shipmate who died aboard Requin. I do not have the eloquent vocabulary or the ability to craft the phrasing required to do proper honor to a fallen mate. Wish I did... If anyone rates such a homily, it's Tink.

This one is rough. We were alley rats together and well after his death I came to know and love his family... His brother, his sister and his lovely mother.

His name was Marl Garlock. He came from McConnellsburg, Pennsylvania, where they called him "Tinker" or "Tink"... We called him "Lil' Abner."

The day he arrived, he dropped down the after battery hatch, dumped his gear and came forward to the crews mess where we were taking a small mid-morning Spanish recess, swapping lies with coffee. He had just cleared Great Lakes. He was a tall lad. They ran out of dungaree trousers his length and issued him trou that hit him three inches above his ankles. They used to say that God never intended to create mice... They were elephants before they entered the Navy supply system.

So there was this new guy. Freshly minted sub school grad via the T-division on the Orion... Standing there in GP boots (general purpose high tops) and high-water pants.

"Hey kid, tide's out... You can roll 'em down."

"Hey Lil' Abner, what happened? Did Dogpatch burn down?"

"Hey Abner, you'n Daisy Mae lookin' fer a home?"

He became Lil' Abner from then on.

The next morning, Lil'Abner shows up at morning chow. The cook yells out,

"Watcha havin, Abner?"

"Watcha got?"

"Pretty much anything you want... But if you eat turtle eggs and hummin' bird wings, then go to Annapolis and eat forward... You take what y'want, but y'eat what you take..."

"Give me a dozen eggs scrambled, four toast... Six link sausage , shitload of bacon and a black coffee."

"Hey kid, never bullshit a cook. If you're serious, you got it. You pull my leg and I'll bounce you off the inside of the pressure hull."

"I AM serious. You gonna stand there all day runnin' yur mouth, or are you gonna earn what they pay you and fix me some breakfast?"

Tink ate one dozen eggs and everything that went with it.

"Hey kid, you got a gahdam tapeworm?"

"Garlock... Is it true that your mother couldn't afford to feed you anymore, so she smashed your plate and tossed your butt out the door?"

Tink could take it and deal it out. Within a week, he had degenerated into a full-fledged after battery rat.

Talked about hunting all the time. Closest most of us had come to hunting was doin' in rats with a pellet gun, while they were doing their 'Rockettes' imitation across our mooring lines.

Lil' Abner was neck-deep in 90% of the stupidity cooked up in the alley, but since he can no longer defend himself, I leave him out of the stories. That way, when I buy the farm and get to where either God or the devil billets boat sailors, Tink won't punch my lights out and will have saved me one of those racks where you don't hot sack... Like in God's goatlocker (When you die, everyone makes Master Chief - that's why they call it Heaven).

Lil' Abner went down in the pump room to wipe down the diamond plate deck plates and equipment. He opened and lifted out a plate so the belowdecks watch could see the bilge level and pump when necessary. At some point, he stretched out on the deck plates. Belowdecks watch and trim manifold operator thought he was catching siesta Zs.

What had happened was that Tink Garlock was wiping down with a solvent that came in a can with no warning that it was toxic and shouldn't be used in confined spaces. Someone said that it was intended to clean airplanes and that anywhere you could put an airplane was not a confined space. Argument useless at this point since Tink was overcome and died in the pump room.

His brother, Bob Garlock took this tragic, senseless loss and fashioned it into a living tribute to Tink.

Bob Garlock began the Requin reunion. He started rounding up sailors who served on Requin from '45 to '70. The list grows larger each year as does the reunion. Without Bob Garlock, there would be no reunion. It's always in Pittsburgh because that's where the boat is. If you or anyone you know rode Requin, get in touch with Bob at (717) 485-3451.

At the first reunion, we took a boat ride down the Ohio and back. It was a beautiful fall evening. Snipes gathered at the fantail to suck their lungs full of diesel exhaust and play the 'Do you remember that silly bastard off the USS So-in-so' game. Tim Conaty, a third class quartermaster, was forward. The skipper, Ed Frothingham yelled,

"Conaty, can you fix our position?"

"Aye sir... If my calculations are correct, we are either approaching La Harve or entering Tokyo."

Then someone yelled, "Jeezus, isn't this perfect weather?" And someone, can't remember who, hollered back, "What did you expect? We've got Lil' Abner standing watch on the weather!"

He was ship's company... Always will be.

Standing Lookout by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

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.

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 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.

Idiots and Pan-fried Iguana by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Before I entered the boat service, there were a number of things I'd never heard of... During my enlistment, that list grew. One thing the submarine service taught me... Sure was a helluva lot of weird stuff out there a kid from East Tennessee never heard of.

The top of the list had to be iguanas. Those bastards have to be the ugliest living things on the planet. God must have had one helluva rough day when he started cranking out those rascals.

I figure He took your basic Mark One, Mod Six lizard, went to His Unit of Issue, One Each, major disgusting accessory locker and bolted at least one of every nasty thing in there on that stupid lizard. When He finished, He kicked back, popped open a cold one, smiled and said,

"I think I'll turn these ugly looking sonuvabitches loose in Panama to amuse the idiot submarine crews I'm thinking about putting together."

Iguanas must have sex when it is very dark. Things that nasty looking sure as hell couldn't do it if they got a good look at each other. In the now famous words of Mike Hemming,

"They couldn't have given it away free to a messcook."

Panama, early '60s. Eskimo Joe, Tubes and me were pulling liberty in Colon. Street vendors hawking all kinds of weird stuff to eat. Most of it looked like the feature of the week on Mutual of Omaha's *Wild Kingdom*. We had developed an affinity for barbecued monkey strips. Warm Pepsi and monkey jerky consumed in the hot sun can become a gastric adventure after sundown. Evidence of digestive rejection could be found roaming around in the liberty launch bilges.

Big Joe said,

"You guys ever eat iguana?"

"You gotta be kidding!"

"No... Seriously... Not bad... Ate some down here in the mid '50s. Actually the stuff's pretty damn good."

"Eskimo man, I'd have to be ten minutes away from death by starvation to intentionally consider eating a gahdam ugly lizard."

"For guys who go around bragging about trying anything once, you guys sure reshuffle the deck. You'll never get another chance to say you did it."

Somewhere in the neighborhood of four or five warm beers later, I ate iguana for the first and last time. All I can remember was a little guy with a mustache... Four inch sideburns... Three days of beard stubble... Missing teeth... Shoe soles loose... A dented skillet... The wafting odor of rancid cooking oil and white chunks of prime lizard... Ugly Lizard McNuggets.

Eskimo Joe always blamed the rancid cooking oil. Whatever the hell it was, the net effect was that it damn near killed us. Dying would have been the easy part, it was living that was rough. Iguana attacks you at both ends and does its' damndest to turn you inside out. You get 'so damn regular' that you could set the second hand on an Ingersol watch. Today, if I see an iguana on television, I start an involuntary sprint to the nearest head.

Someone once told me that iguanas were an endangered species. Jeezus, they should be! Being a career, Hall of Fame messcook-lookout-deckape, I never fully understood or appreciated the endangered species concept. Who in the hell is gonna miss houseflies, ticks, termites, rats, skunks, horny toads, iguanas, rattlesnakes, man-eating sharks, big hairy spiders, nuke boat sailors, and komoto dragons? You take the average idiot whining about thinning out the above-named sonuvabitches... Put him in a dark room with a couple of iguanas, a half dozen horny toads, a komoto dragon, and the sonuvabitch would undergo a genuine position transformation. Just let one of the sonuvabitches crawl out from under his bunk or come crawling out of a shower drain.

I have arrived at the conclusion that a large percentage of the weird stuff that resides on this planet lives in Africa, Australia, Panama, and within a thirty-mile radius of Reno, Nevada. The stuff there walks upright and wears hand-tooled boots. That brings this old SUBRON SIX duty messcook to question number two. Why would any grown fellow own a horse, when for the same money, he could wind up with a Harley Davidson? Take the fact that nothing ever fell out of a motorcycle's rear end that required a shovel or was good for roses. If it weren't for the Kentucky Derby and old Roy Rogers movies, horsemeat would be just one more weird ingredient in a Big Mac.

(Cowboy, I never said any of that. Ray Stone, well known horse pucky dealer and purveyor of bull dookey, is a ventriloquist.)

We were young, we were bulletproof and we were going to live forever. We never learned the arts of negotiation and compromise. We resolved disputes by beating hell out of each other... Took less time and solved most issues. Our behavior was a reflection of an attitude handed down to us by the men who pinned the tail on Tojo's donkey. But no one at New London ever said I would have to eat gahdam lizard.

Anchor Pools by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Never won an anchor pool. Anchor pools were operated by the slush fund, a.k.a. the Saltwater Savings and Loan.

For those who never rode an anchor pool boat, I will try to explain their operation. First of all, the things are illegal... Totally and absolutely outlawed by everyone from the Chief of Naval Operations down to the squadron chaplain.

The odds are terrible. You would stand a better chance betting on a blind mule at the Kentucky Derby. What you do is contribute five bucks to the Saltwater Savings and Loan and it provides you with the opportunity to win \$50, the remaining bucks going to the 'slush.'

You actually never used the term 'slush fund' because the bulkheads had ears. You said 'Saltwater Savings and Loan' or 'contributions to Mrs. Murphy's Mothers Day card.'

Let me explain how an anchor pool works... You need a pen, two sheets of white typing paper, a sheet of carbon paper (do they still make carbon paper? Xerox sure must've kicked the slats outta the carbon paper racket...), a piece of stiff cardboard and a good stapler.

You stapled two sheets of typing paper together with the carbon paper sandwiched in between. Then you laid out a grid with 60 squares. With the carbon in place, what you got were two mirror image blank grids - one exactly over the other one.

You then delicately... What a word to use in conjunction with anything done by a submarine sailor... You carefully folded back the top sheet and the carbon, and placed numbers from one to sixty in random order, in the sixty blank boxes of the lower sheet. Then you returned the folded top sheet and carbon so that you had a visible top sheet containing blank boxes.

You then circulated among your fellow inmates of your submersible septic tank and relieved each player of five frog skins. Most anchor pools were five frog skin pools. I heard rumors that on some big ships they had pools with hundred buck boxes. We didn't have any direct relatives of Bonnie and Clyde, so we kept it to one Abe Lincoln a box.

Once you had picked a box, you would write your name in it. Because the carbon paper was still in place sandwiched over the numbered boxes, your name would show up superimposed over some number between one and sixty. The pages were stapled to the cardboard so you had no way of knowing what your number was.

The corner boxes went first. Boxes in the middle went next. There were many scientific systems used... There was the 'Hand over the eyes, finger point' method, the 'Eenie-meeny-miney-moe' selection process, and the favorite 'Shit, just pick one for me' method.

I personally liked the one in the middle of the lower edge. This location had been revealed to me in a 151 proof rum-induced dream... At the time I was speaking directly with Zeus.

Old hands knew you had to get hold of an anchor pool sign up board before it passed aft of the after battery. When that board passed through the forward and after enginerooms... And throttlemen and oilers wrote on it... It got greasy snipe prints all

over the cardboard and sheets. By the time it reached the guys popping the 'electric sticks,' it was a grimy mess.

This in no way places the blame on enginemen and motor macs... No sir, everyone knows these individuals had lovely cleaned and manicured hands. The root cause of all the nasty looking oily, greasy fingerprints were the 'lower flats trolls.' Those little sonuvabitches caused all kinds of problems. They could louse up a vertical drive on a Fairbanks Morse rock crusher or throw a lower crank. One thing they rarely did and that was picked a winning anchor pool number.

If you couldn't fill the card, all the blank boxes were owned by the 'Mrs. Murphy's Mothers Day card fund'... A subsidiary of the Requin branch of North Atlantic Saltwater Savings and Loan - pier 22. Fine institution... Open around the clock... Known to invest heavily in sea stores cigarettes that became available at somewhat exorbitant prices after three weeks on the snorkel.

The SS&L had a slogan, "Someone's gonna screw you... Let it be us and keep it in the family"

The SS&L brought you beer ball games, bail money, cash to pay fines, ship's parties, and fare for unanticipated trips home. The only financial institution in North America that would bankroll visits to cathouses with no collateral required.

Each anchor pool had a prize, usually fifty bucks. When you came in to tie up, the Old Man would yell to the line handlers' topside to "Put your lines over when you can." This triggered a shower of heavies... Heaving lines thrown at the pier or the deck of some outboard boat. 'Heavie' for the uninitiated, is a line... A light line that has a big knot tied on one end to weight it. The knot is called a 'monkey fist'... You weight it so you can throw the light line across the water. A line handler is your counterpart on the pier or the boat you will tie up to. He catches your heavie and takes up the slack then pulls the heavy hawser over that will tie your boat up. It takes four hawsers to tie up a smoke boat.

You can increase the range, velocity and lethal potential of a heaving line by making your monkey fist around a large metal nut, a pool ball or a smooth river rock. Bounce a little sweetheart like that off a bosun'mate's skull and you are guaranteed instant celebrity followed by certain death.

When a line handler catches the first heavie, the Navy considers the ship moored... And the Old Man tells the



duty quartermaster to mark the time in the log. No one gives a damn about the hour but the minute, of which there are sixty possibilities, determines your anchor pool winner. The quartermaster passes the word,

"Ship moored sixteen thirty-three..."

We rip open the board and look at the names inscribed in carbon ink over the numbered squares.

"Here it is... Number 33... Name's Tick Dick... 'Tick Dick' Edwards... The lucky sonuvabitch... Guess who's buying at Bells tonight!"

Over the 21 MC you hear,

"Seaman first Ronald C. Edwards will mail Mrs. Murphy's Mothers Day card..."

Now every sonuvabitch on the boat knows whom the beer at Bells will be on for the better part of the first hour.

Anchor pools weren't a good thing to base your future security or retirement plan on. They were at best, a lousy percentage bet, but they were a critical leg in the illegal financial system that kept the lads who rode vintage petroleum-powered submersible iron in beer, whiskey and ragged around the edges female companionship.

Butt Kits and Battle Lanterns by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Morning quarters, early morning, 1960... The COB looks at me and says,

"You new?"

"Yo Chief... Been attached to the Orion's T-Division waiting on you guys to get back from the Med."

"Well, sometime this afternoon, after the yeoman gets you checked aboard, I'm gonna stick you on messcooking. Until then, go through the boat and dump the butt kits and check the battle lanterns."

Thus began my illustrious naval career.

A little short of Lord Nelson, John Paul Jones, Hornblower, and Halsey, but on par with Barnicle Bill, Popeye and the Cracker Jack kid... The best years of my life.

Post enlistment rehabilitation didn't go well with me... It didn't matter how much Johnsons No-Roach I gargled, I still had the vocabulary of a trash truck operator.

Pajamas were and still remain something you only wear when you have house guests. I've broken the habit of carrying my smokes in a sock... Or rolled in a T-shirt sleeve.

I no longer yell "Put the iron back in the pneumonia hole!" when someone leaves the door open.

I still drink my coffee black... Hot... Warm... Lukewarm... Cold... Doesn't matter. And I still favor that old bottom of the pot 'black cat' coffee... That stuff that turns you into Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire an hour later.

I can still go two days on tuna fish sandwiches and coffee.

I remember how to operate most of the stuff on my old boat... And to recognize that a lot of stuff has been unbolted for the Indian trade.

I have done my damndest to keep my mouth shut when I visit some old taxidermy embalmed smoke boat and some non-qual visitors guide explains how our old boats operated a mile down, made 50 knots and carried one hundred and fifty torpedoes. I just move along in the tourist sheep dip line and look as amazed as the rest of the dumb clucks. I think that is known as 'old age mellowing' and that your wife has you saddle-broke and p-wipped. What the hell, who cares? What pleasure would it be to embarrass some non-paid sea scout volunteer by jerking his pants down in public? Hell, the kid is in fine company when you look back over the number of grand master liars, bullshit artists and thirty-third degree horse manure weavers the boat service turned out over the years. It is damn near impossible to use "Gospel truth" and "United States Submarine Force" in the same sentence.

I still get misty-eyed when I hear "Anchors' Aweigh" or smell fresh baked cinnamon buns. Every once in a while, I use the terms "get squared away" and "pop the sonuvabitch between the running lights."

When its hot, I can still see Bobby Ray standing in the forward engine room, dripping sweat... Looking at the 7MC where the skipper has just called back to inquire if it is hot...

"Hot cap'n? Hot? Hell, it's hotter'n two mice screwin' in a wool sock..."

My daughters grew up knowing only when it was really hot, the mice were back in the sock... Never told them what the mice were up to.

When I was in college, I used to sleep 'figure four' style. That's where you bend your leg and tuck a foot behind your other knee. That way, if surface rolls dump you out of your rack, you don't end up landing face-down in the passageway. I'd also tuck my shoes, toe first between my mattress and the box spring then dump the contents of my pockets in my shoes... My lighter, keys, pens, etc., even my dog tags. I did this every night. One night, my roommate asked what in the hell I did that for... Habit. If you have to roll out

for battle stations in the middle of the night, you know where your boots are. You're not crawling around in the passageway with the rest of the sleepy-eyed mob, getting the hell kicked out of you by ships' company flying fore and aft... And whining,

"Any sonuvabitch seen my left boot?"

I took off my dog tags when I slept. Once on a heavy roll, I rolled over and smashed into a side locker with a dog tag wedged perpendicular to my rib cage. You only want to do that once... Since then, I took my dog tags off and tossed them in my boot.

A first class yeoman once asked me what might happen if we had some unforeseen occurrence in the middle of the night and no one could figure out who I was.

"Peabrain, every sonuvabitch in the alley knows me... Knows the bunk I use... Anyway, if we are talking major disaster, we all suck saltwater and get to a point where the only thing interested in you is eating you and doesn't give a damn about your name, birth date, blood type, or your religion."

I continued to toss my bead chain and tags in my boot every night.

Boots toes tucked under your mattress helped you stay in your bunk by making the opening between the mattress edge and the bottom of the rack above you too damn small to roll through. When I poked them in, it was a lot like locking the front door before you went to bed.

I am a creature of habit. I got used to the vibration of the engines when I slept... Loved it. Used to press my head up between my rolled up foul weather jacket and a side locker so I could feel the gentle engine vibration when we snorkeled or rode full on four on the surface. When I left the boats, I found the only way I could come close to duplicating this was to wear a loud ticking watch and sleep with my wrist under my ear. You lose all that with battery operated or digital watches.

I missed my old foul weather jacket. Sure, the damn thing looked like it belonged in a New Delhi dumpster but it was my old faithful pal. It kept me warm... Gave me a place to warm my hands... Pockets for hot buns or a piece of fruit... Told the idiots on the Orion that I was one of the 'great unwashed' nesting in one of the cast iron animal farms connected to their lower brow... And it allowed me to get those thirty-five cent Alcatraz haircuts Orion was famous for. Also, my old raunchy jacket made a great pillow and no one called you a sissy if you tucked it under your head. Some second class brought a pillow on board and the animals pinned so much hell on him, he shot the damn thing out the GDU the second week out.

I missed the awesome spectacle and incredible majesty of real heavy weather... The roller coaster ride of banging around on the bridge. It was the closest I ever got to God... He knew it and I knew it.

Most of all, I missed the crew... I missed guys passing you going fore and aft with greetings like,

"Dex, did your mother have any kids that lived?"

Or

"Don't take this personal, but you are one ugly bastard..."

It was the Requin's mating call... Our 'When you care enough to send the very best' greeting.

And it all began dumping butt kits and checking battle lanterns.

Thunder Mugs and Freckle Makers by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

At some point, I knew I would come face to face with the problem of revelation of deeply held smoke boat secrets. What I am about to lay before you will rank with the most sacred Masonic goodies and the secret signs of the Baltimore Orioles. In the past, what I am about to reveal was passed from the Grand Master of Smoke Boat-a-tarianism to an apprentice practitioner under a one-half inch thick lead blanket in the bottom of a mile deep coal mine.

A submarine was a miniature municipality. The skipper was the mayor... Wardroom, the city council. The snipes handled the utilities. The COB was the sheriff... The rated men were the responsible citizens most of the time... Part of the time? Now and then? A few times a year? On Groundhog Day? Well anyway, at the absolute bottom of the social structure, you had the non-rated alley rats... The bums... Hobos... Homeless people... The nomadic tribe who moved from flash pad to flash pad in search of an uninterrupted nights sleep.

In India, the human equivalent of non-rated people are called 'the untouchables'... Many have leprosy. Hogan's Alley on the Requin was a hybrid leper colony and primate cage. One of our multitude of extremely important responsibilities was care, maintenance and cleaning of our municipal sewer system. You eat... You poop. Cooks handled the former... We took care of the residual byproduct.

To fully appreciate the importance of this feature of our assigned duty, you must first understand the complex world of subsurface poop moving.

Everything that eventually found its way to one of our three sanitary tanks, made its way through a system of gravity drains. The scuttlebutt (water fountain for non-quals)... Cook's and messcook's sinks... Coffee urn... Air conditioning condensate drains... Head sinks... Urinals... Shower drains... And probably some stuff I forgot (Old age -

CRS)... And finally, the heads (a.k.a. poopers, shitters, thrones, best-seat-in-the-house, the perch, commode, toilet... You got it, the next to the last stop for processed Spam. To us, they were the 'thunder mugs and freckle makers.'

Once you got rated and qualified, you became a below decks watch stander. This honor took you out of the topside watch rotation and was an indication that the COB had found a small spark of intelligence that with his expert advice and guidance, could be fanned into the flame of Naval leadership. Or as in my case, he was short on below decks watchstanders and rolled the dice on whether, given the opportunity, I could sink the ship or trigger a mutiny. I was given a clipboard - the vestment of below decks authority... And with the help of rig bills and intuitive awareness, I went forth to check bilges, wake up ungrateful bastards, render 'on service' fuel status reports, make one and two-way surface dump requests, and blow sanitariums.

There was an art to blowing sanitariums.

First, you rigged the tank for blowing. That consisted of following a rig bill and closing all master and backup drain lines valves in lines leading to the sanitary tank. If some clown was in the shower, you did not say,

"Hey champ, I'll catch the rest of the line-up and be back to pull the drain screen and T-handle the deck drain closed."

Why didn't you say this? Because nine times out of ten you would forget and create either a 225lb. ships' service air or external sea pressure fountain of high pressure decomposing doo-doo that would not increase your popularity with the shipmates in the affected compartment. Not that I was a flash in high school physics, but crap, like everything else in life, takes the path of least resistance. You leave a valve open and without fail, poop will make an unscheduled appearance.

You really knew you were in trouble when the lid on the coffee urn began a little dance signifying the arrival and percolation of partially dissolved head tissue and accompanying commodities... Maxwell House with Scotts' Extra Fluffy just has to be consumed to really be fully appreciated.

If the 225lb. ships' service air held and the pressure began to build slowly, all drains were secure and you could open the overboard discharge. During the next few minutes, ships' service air overcame external sea pressure, forcing the contents of the sanitary tank out to sea. When the tank was nine-tenths clear, you secured the blow. In combat, an air bubble leaving the boat at 200 feet the size of an orange, would arrive at the surface the size of a VW bus.

So you secured the overboard discharge and vented the remaining air at whatever the external sea pressure was, back into the boat. This unique sensation can be replicated by feeding a buffalo hard-boiled eggs for a week then getting in a Chevy Nova with him

and rolling the windows up. Someone once said we earned our sub pay based on inboard venting.

The heads were flushed by way of a rotating drum valve and a long handle. At the time we rode the old Tench class boats, they were approaching twenty years old (the equivalent of a 108 year old chorus girl or 650 dog years). By that time, the drum valves had worn to a point where a little air slipped past them, making the water seal in the head bowl percolate like a fizzing coke. If you happened to be parked on one at the time, it would leave little bubble splatters all over the cheeks of your fanny... Hence the origin of the term 'freckle makers'.

The sanitary system was a critical one and required a hell of a lot of attention. Most of the cast parts were brass and subject to verdigris corrosion (verdigris is that weird green stuff that grows on the base of 20 gauge shotgun shells). All the stuff was connected by copper line. A large part of my early submarine career was spent wire-brushing verdigris and Brasso-ing copper pipe. At the point you were between COBs, you painted as much copper pipe as you could get away with... We looked upon it as saving the tax paying public a small fortune in Brasso... Which also gave us more time to study etiquette and opera appreciation.

There is a very exclusive club in the submarine community. Very few submariners have been given the honor of admittance. Membership guarantees induction in the Deck Force Hall of Fame. The club is called,

'THE GRAND ORDER OF SUBMERSIBLE SHIT TANK DIVERS'

When we went into the yards in '62, the Chief came up to me and said,

"Dex, I'm thinking of a number between one and ten. If you can guess it correctly, you get a week with Gina Lollabrigida in any hotel you choose, with 20 cases of beer and a rental car thrown in."

"Chief, is Gina buck nekkit?"

"No son, her toenails are painted. If they weren't, she'd be buck nekkit."

"No cheap 'No-name' beer?"

"Imported beer."

"Gas in the car?"

"Full tank."

"Okay Chief, I'll take a shot at guessing the number..."

"Wait...There's something I haven't told you..."

"Yeh Chief, what?"

"If you don't guess the number I'm thinking of, you dive number two sanitary."

"Dive the shit tank?"

"You got it."

"...SIX!"

"No, but you really came close."

We all got close a lot but nobody ever got to spend a week with buck nekkit Gina... That poor woman must have spent a helluva lot of 1962 and '63 walking around with no clothes on, waiting for some submarine deck ape to guess the right number. We just kept losing and the COB kept winning.

I got to visit the inside of number two and scrape a lot of unidentifiable stuff off the interior surfaces. Later, the skipper put a page in my service record announcing that I had visited the inside of number two poop tank and would not have to do it again in my naval career.

Some people see Rome... Some Paris... I've visited inside #2 and I sign autographs

Meanwhile, Back at the Snake Ranch by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In an earlier diatribe on life in a non-rated man's submarine approved Snake Ranch... I told about our low rent Shangri-La above Ocean View out Willoughby Spit, going toward the bridge tunnel. It wasn't one of the featured tourist attractions of the Norfolk area... I mean, you couldn't buy postcards or tour books that mentioned the place.

What it was, was a sanctuary and rest home for exhausted members of our undersea forces afloat... Who guarded the saltwater expanse resting off our coast. It was a haven where submarine serfdom came to drink beer, listen to shit-kicking music, take hour-long hot showers, play cards, cuss Chief Petty Officers, nuke sailors, Nikita Krushchev and everyone in France, catch up on sleep, and hold Bacchanalian feasts and seek the pleasures beyond panty elastic.

Life at the Ranch was great. It was one of the best-kept secrets of the Cold War... It was never mentioned in any Tom Clancy book or found its way into one of those Discovery Channel documentaries on how we won the Cold War.

That's a shame... It was the home of the world's largest collection of randomly tossed empty Budweiser beer cans and the location where Naval personnel joined in a joint effort with female civilians to field test damn near every birth control method other than Saran Wrap, then available in the Norfolk area.

It was the place where hanky-panky got raised to a major league sport. We had no TV and nobody ever missed it. On a heavy beer drinking night you had to sign up for a place in the pee rotation on a clipboard nailed to the single seat head's door. In an emergency, you could always step out the rear door of our estate and hose down the world's largest empty beer can collection.

And there were the card games. Jeezus, did we play cards! We wore out decks of Bicycle cards at a rate that must have supported a shift at the Bicycle Card factory.

We played Hearts and straight cowboy poker... Five draw, seven stud... No Girl Scout Camp... Over and under things with one eye... Men with axes... Clubs wild if Wednesday is an even day... None of that shit. We allowed no activity at the Snake Ranch that took more than 30 seconds to explain to a drunk. This kept everybody happy.

There was a Laundromat on the highway to Virginia Beach. It was a great place to meet women. Most of the gals that became regulars at the Ranch, were also regulars at the Laundromat. We called trips to do laundry, "Going to check the traps..." After three or four weeks of punching holes in the North Atlantic, twenty minutes of watching girl's panties passing by a dryer window over and over... And over... Could have your average boat sailor barking at the moon.

In the evening, we would grab a gal, a blanket, a cold six, and a radio, and walk over to the beach. We'd watch the Ocean View roller coaster... The ships passing old Point Comfort and the Thimble Shoals Light... And fumble with blouse buttons. If it got any better than that, they hid the instructions in the wardroom.

We never had a parking problem... We only had one car. We owned stock in it... I sold mine for several reasons... First, the sonuvabitch always needed some kind of work and the 'partnership' always needed money. It was a four-wheeled money evaporator... And the fool thing went to New York all the time. In short, the damn thing never went in any direction I was heading in. I can't complain, I doubled my money... When I left SUBRON SIX, the 'Tidewater Torpedo Joint Holding Company' was alive and well... And the torpedo had bad tires.

'Dixie' and 'Tiger' were two barmaids who shared their delights with numerous subsurface afloat force members. Many a boat sailor has wonderful, long ago memories of laying alongside a set of 'double Ds' on a chilly night or having his back scratched by one, or both of the greatest barmaids in the history of professional barmaiding. The guys who married Tiger and Dixie got great gals who did their part in the Cold War and could do stuff that would set a Hindu sex manual on fire. They were great gals!

The only interior decorations were an RC Cola sign and a naked lady calendar from some welding equipment supply house... If you don't count all the carry out menus tacked on the back of the kitchen door with the 'Fill this for us, Santy Claus' sign.

We didn't have trash and garbage collection service, so we had to bag it and take it back to pier 22... And we had water and electric bills comparable to an auto assembly plant... I've never had one close to what we shelled out and that includes damn near forty years of inflation... That industrial cooling box and the large capacity quick recovery hot water heater sucked up kilowatts like an atom smasher.

We used the phone at the Esso station since we didn't have one... Going down to make phone calls meant picking up a couple of free (remember FREE?) road maps. Someone made the incredible discovery that an unfolded Esso map would cover our entire kitchen table for crab feasts.

Some of my best memories center around the Snake Ranch... Always called 'The Ranch', it was long before there was anything called recycling... We left enough aluminum beer cans in the backyard to build a 747 or 1,500 Yugos. No one above E-4 was ever told of the existence of the place... All 'Rancheros' were single, mostly broke and could survive for long periods of time on beer and pork rinds.

The Ranch is still there... It's painted... Looks respectable and nice people live there. But there was a time... Remember that line in the song...

"Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam..."

Every room looked exactly like buffalo had roamed there for weeks.

Silver Dolphins by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

How can an insignia that means so much to so many of us be debased by the Naval establishment by handing it out wholesale as a midshipman's summer cruise souvenir? When you didn't work hard for something, it has no worth. We have devalued most decorations to the point that a large part of what you see above the pockets of American service personnel means little or nothing. The men and women who wear them know in their hearts that all this meaningless gedunk has the same value as the decorative icing on a wedding cake... It is harder to earn Scout merit badges than it is to pick up some of the ribbons of today.

The men and women of this generation have known no other system and have no point of reference... They have no way of knowing it was not always that way. They have no way of knowing how valued and respected our Silver Dolphins were... Why? Because the men of the Navy knew how difficult it was to get them. If nothing else, the entire world was aware of the magnificent record and willing sacrifice of our World War II submarine force.

We don't like to talk about the national disgrace that attended our intervention in Southeast Asia... We have made many attempts to cast our defeat in that theater in some kind of bullshit rationale. There was no surrender... No American handed over his/her sidearm and watched our flag hauled down. We got our ass kicked by a little country with no navy... An air force that was an international joke... And very little technology. I cannot tell you why, but anyone who is honest can recognize an ass kicking. I did not serve in Viet Nam. When I went to the boats, it was called French Indochina. I want to make it clear, I do not denigrate the service of anyone who served in Southeast Asia... As I said, I wasn't there and there is nothing worse than a sonuvabitch who wasn't there portraying themselves as an expert on something that they have no first-hand experience in.

Americans hate a loser... Especially a loser who cloaks his failure in excuses. We admire a man who puts up a good fight, gets whipped, admits his failure, and moves on. That was the way it was in my generation. In Southeast Asia, the entire team saw it was being thrashed and left the field with ten minutes left in the fourth quarter... And took the ball with them. I think the kids today call that the 'tiny heart syndrome'. We tried to pack our bags and steal away in the night... It didn't work and proud America had to sit and watch the evening news show us the most embarrassing goat screw of all time. The men who master-minded that sorry epic should wander the earth wearing paper bags.

No one thought a whole helluva lot of military service in the early '70s... It was a joke... Dope smoking was rampant... Neo-Nazi elements flourished in our so-called elite forces. Arrogance abounded... The 'My SEALs are tougher than your Green Berets' bullshit. Glory belongs to those who deserve it. It is earned by deeds. Interservice rivalry - not good. My rants... Even if mostly tongue-in-cheek... My ripping of the nuke force - not good. Born of exclusion that was a corrosive influence. My mindless bullshit perpetuates the same stupidity I rail against. RamJet eloquently pointed that out to me... He was right. That is what smoke boat shipmates do for each other... They don't sugar coat it. They say you are simply full of shit and you listen. Its called reciprocal respect... It used to come with Silver Dolphins.

To boost recruiting, the services adopted the 'everybody gets a badge' policy. They invented the awards package practice... Multiple ribbons for the same thing. Examples... After Grenada, I was sitting in my office in the pentagon and looked out the window at a vast uniformed formation in the center court. Officers were walking down the rows shaking hands and handing each man a brown envelope... Containing the Grenada invasion decoration package. These guys had been thousands of miles from the action, in the comfort of the pentagon... Their long-range support earned multiple ribbons. Anyone involved in the one hundred-hour war in the gulf got a minimum of three medals. The three idiots recently captured in the Balkans and whom Jesse Jackson released were a slap in the face... These three clowns got six medals. For what? Why should getting captured, no matter how unfortunate, rate six gahdam medals?

Kids today waltz around with rows of ribbons. Our Navy has multiplied its badge grab bag to the point it makes you lose your lunch. Bigger equals better... Take a look at the SEAL badge... Looks like the hood ornament off an Italian roadster... Takes three pins to hold it on a uniform. The Air Force hands out little silver badges that look a lot like parachute wings... You get them for doing accurate paperwork!

The fine men and women of our armed forces are being seduced by decoration inflation. Look at the old films of returning World War II GIs... A couple of rows of ribbons earned dearly. Men like Old Gringo wore Dolphin patches on their sleeves. Old Gringo's cloth Dolphins made the Silver Dolphins we worked like hell to get, mean something. We wanted to be worthy of the legacy men like Old Gringo had handed us.

It would be a sin to hand out Silver Dolphins like Cracker Jack prizes... To give them away as a summer memory. Decisions like that come from little men who have no idea what they mean to you and me, and we are powerless to do a gahdam thing about it. That hurts.

We used to laugh at Latin American Naval officers. They had meaningless ribbons, medals, badges, sashes, gold braid and big hats with a load of crap embroidered all over their visors. They looked like comic opera characters. Now, our ranking officers, men who never slugged it out toe-to-toe with another world power, wear more meaningless crap than a South American dictator.

Ribbons don't make the man. Training, pride and an established record, make the man. Valor comes through reputation. Any man who crawled the volcanic sand beaches at Iwo Jima is a hero. He doesn't need a rhinestone-studded badge to tell him so. All we have to know is, he was there.

They put a 'V' for valor on silver and bronze stars to tell you they were combat decorations. What other kind of bronze and silver stars are there? In our day, those medals told us the man wearing them had been shot at for a living. More inflationary bullshit.

If by some Tooth Fairy induced miracle I woke up as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs tomorrow, I would have every unit commander pass around a galvanized bucket and tell the troops to toss in any worthless post Viet Nam badge, medal or ribbon not earned under fire... And I would make U.S. military insignia mean something once more. Next, I would phone the Postmaster General and tell him I wanted to see the design for the Hundredth Anniversary of the Submarine Force stamp on my desk by the end of the week. I would tell him the day Donald Duck, Snoopy, Mickey Mouse, Elvis Presley, and Marilyn Monroe were worthier of postal recognition than boat sailors, was the day we had lost all ability to recognize national contribution.

None of this applies to the U. S. Marine Corps. The Marines, God bless 'em, have done their damndest to resist the seduction of 'Something for nothing' awards. Being a U. S.

Marine is all one has to be... We all know their unequalled record... A history written in heroic deeds wherever they have gone.

Social experiment, sensitivity concern, hand out funding and the erosion of a previously proud awards system have victimized this generation of military men and women. Poor bastards... We owe them better.

Pier 22 by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Pier 22, Destroyer and Submarine Piers... 1959.

Somewhere well before my smoke boat days... A point sometime between World War II and shooting folks into space, CE piers (old 'Convoy Escort' piers) became D&S piers (Destroyer and Submarine piers). The United States Navy does this a lot. They have this master plan... The Naval Schedule of Constant Change. Somewhere in a tarpaper shack in East Jeezus, Nebraska, there are two hundred J.G.s and a brain-dead yeoman whose sole purpose is to rename stuff so old veterans can't locate a damn thing to reignite memories.

This, coupled with municipalities initiating aggressive civic improvement programs, forces old bluejackets to wander around in areas of old ports, constantly looking at each other and saying,

"What'n the hell happened to.....? The sonuvabitch used to be right about here."

Civic improvement translates into gin mill demolition... Tearing down bars, naval tailor shops, greasy spoons, tattoo parlors, and high volume cathouses. I never figured it out... Why doesn't the term 'historic preservation' apply to structures that catered to the carnal requirements of the Second Fleet from World War I, until operating seaports went through their 'born again' transformation in the late 60's? If you went to Norfolk today, you would get the distinct impression that all we did was visit the U.S.O. and play a helluva lot of minature golf.

Old SUBRON SIX lads need to pass the raghat to collect enough funds to erect a fifty-foot high statue of a big-busted, bleached blond in clamdigger pants two sizes too small and a white plastic pocketbook. Inscription to read,

"Hey sailor, wanna party? 35 buckos and you pay for the room..."

Cold War dollys. They were good times.

Lads who missed the experience... Lads who never paid dues... Lads who rationalized and handbuilt self-serving perverted moral arguments against national service, are poor shortchanged bastards who must feel all alone in a voting booth... Kinda like the good men who bought their tickets on the salt water, jungle heat, high altitude, and miserable

cold installment plan, slipped them a complimentary pass. I don't know about the rest of you, but when I close that curtain, it is pretty damn crowded in there... I'm in there representing a lot of good men who will reside on the bottom of the sea until the last big 'Morning Quarters' in the sky.

Pier 22... Dumpsters, fuel hoses... Telephone lines... Old busted topside watch shacks... Stacked stores awaiting assembly of a loading party. Boat sailors exchanging embellished bullshit like Bedouin traders.

"Good morning sir."

"Good morning... Exec aboard?"

"Aye sir... Dropped below 'bout thirty minutes ago."

"Did you guys have enough time to get in a full charge?"

"Aye sir."

"Stores loaded?"

"We completed loading stores from Orion at 0300... Disconnected fuel hoses at 0345... Ran guard mail and picked up our traffic from the radio shack on the tender... Drew Notice to Mariners and updated charts from the squadron. Bummed ten 20-pound cans of coffee from Kittiwake and whatever rat-eaten blankets Cubera could spare."

"Ready for sea then?"

"Aye sir."

"Very well... Pass the word we'll be turning over the engines shortly, setting the maneuvering watch and singling up lines in thirty minutes."

That's how we went to work.

Pier 22 was home. If you were single with no crow, it was all the home you had. When the 'brown baggers' (khaki sackers) hauled for clean sheets, home cooking and an armload of mama, we owned 'The Pier'.

If you weren't on duty, you could wander out on the pier to catch a smoke and visit the point of informational exchange... The dumpsters. After evening chow, every messcook on every boat showed up to dump garbage.

E-3 intelligence was exchanged at this mini-oasis. In thirty minutes, you knew what boats were showing what movies, where all the card games would be held that night and the locations where night baking would take place. To the night nomads... The

roaming, cross-pollinating, inter-boat hopping, non rated idiots, this was the nocturnal roadmap. It was what made diesel boats a family... It didn't matter what boat you were on, if you were SUBRON SIX, you belonged. You could always count on a cup of coffee, a meal or a place to plant your worthless butt for any movie being shown on any boat alongside. In a single night, you could get the honor of being verbally abused by chief petty officers of up to a half a dozen smoke boats.

"Hey kid... Don't you sonuvabitches on Requin know where you live? How come every time I turn around, I'm up to my ass in you guys?"

"We love you chief..."

"Well, if I keep seeing your ugly faces, I'm going to put you on our watch bill and issue you a damn qual card."

For those of you who never had the pleasure of engaging in conversation with a boat service chief, this translates to,

"Welcome aboard, it is nice to have you here to share our hospitality and enjoy our gentlemenly convivial atmosphere."

When you left, these old crusty sonuvabitches would leave you with a friendly message for your Chief of the Boat.

"Tell Dutch that Red said he's ugly and his mother dresses him funny... And tell him to kiss you and tuck you in real nice."

They were okay... This was the best they could do.

Pier 22 was a piece of the United States Navy that was ours... The exclusive domain of the Dolphin mob. It was a place where a red lead spattered, unshaven, raggedy-ass boat sailor could get a cup of coffee with a hydraulic oil slick floating in it, a stale doughnut and an action-packed, horseshit loaded sea story all for the price of a handshake. It was the play yard where the submarine force held recess. In a word, it was home.

The Siesta Nest by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Up forward in the superstructure below the walking deck, there was a tiny independent kingdom on Requin known as the 'siesta nest'. It was ruled by King Stukey and inhabited by a kind of moth-eaten raggedy-ass population known as the deck force. Its independence was insured by its inaccessability. No one above E-3 would ever have a purpose to visit or any desire to do so... And I doubt any officer even knew it existed. We figured the siesta nest was safe unless in some moment of insane behavior we applied for membership in the United Nations or attempted to obtain foreign aid.

The kingdom was defined as the space between the bow planes bull gears and the port side limber holes, opposite the chain locker and forward of the impulse air flasks... No nuke could have found it unless God gave them three wise men, camels and floated a star forward of the first salvage air deck plate.

It wasn't very large... You could cover the entire area with a few foulweather jackets and a flattened accumulated lamination of corrugated Krispie Kreme doughnut cartons. Stocked with books, girlie and sports magazines, this became a fairly comfortable hidden Shangri-La. The freeflooding deck allowed light to penetrate through the slots with the intermittent decking providing shade. Air circulated freely through the limber holes providing enough cross-ventilation to clear cigarette smoke.

If the National Association of Loafing, Lazy and Good-for-nothing Sonuvabitches had created plans and specifications for a damn near perfect place to goof off, they couldn't have come up with anything even remotely approaching the siesta nest.

All you had to do was a series of unevenly spaced taps on an air flask to convey the impression that the gang was engaged in productive work... There was only so much inanimate metal and superfluous crap that you could chip, scrape, wirebrush, slap zinc chromate on and paint... Outside of three or four areas that you would need a gynecologist for midgets to get into, we had covered it all. Besides, nobody ever went down there... The place was like a birthmark on Queen Elizabeth's butt... Why worry about it? Who's gonna see it?

We never thought about the boats becoming submarine memorials... We heard that Gillette got 'em all and whacked them up for 'Blue Blades'. We heard the girls at the razor blade factory didn't care about the number of layers of zinc chromate the inside of the superstructure came with... It all looked the same when the crane lifted, electromagnet-hauled it out of the crap compactor. Ethical behavior dictated that we should not waste taxpayer funds on unnecessary zinc chromate and number seven gray.

So, we spent our productive time creating the National Seagoing Skinbook Library... A large collection of paperback novels containing erotic plots and a variety of interesting anatomically challenging acts few people in the world above the walking deck had ever heard of or could have envisioned without having been recently exposed to the literary world of non-qualified personnel.

Adrian Stuke, our supreme ruler, benevolent despot and master librarian, ran the nest. He owned most of the finer books... *I Was Kidnapped by Biker Babes*, *Lust-Starved WACs at Fort Benning* and *The Land of Lesbian Love*, just to name a few.

We spent hours professionally critiqueing this literature and ritualistically cussing anyone involved in the qualification process, all qualified old timers, lifers, the Chief of the Boat, the entire crew of the Orion, airdales, the tin can navy, shore patrol, the Secretary of the Navy, and everyone in France.

Most heavy duty E-3 thinking, griping and plotting was done in the siesta nest. We raised totally non-productive whining to an art form. The fuse to ninety percent of the explosive nonsense and grab-ass that went on, on Requin, was lit in the siesta nest.

In the annals of American history, the siesta nest ranks right up there with Butch Cassidy's *'Hole in the Wall'*, *'The Briar Patch'*, *'The Bat Cave'*, and the place where Jeezus rolled away the Rock.

The nest had a very select list of members... In 1961, we won the Academy Award for the best sound effects to imitate productive work. Some Hollywood star with a gigantic set of boobs had to accept it for us. We were engaged in national security work providing target time to deaf, dumb and blind naval pilots.

The Lucy Light by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

During some dust-up with Mr. Castro's folks to the south, we were somewhere off South Carolina giving unworthy surface craft ping time. We got a change in op orders instructing us to put into some place nobody ever heard of... Port Everglades, Florida. We had no charts for Florida, but being highly resourceful bluejackets, we called for an electrician who came from Pompano Beach. Mr. 'I've got your problem solved' comes to the bridge and explains to our assemblage of complete idiots that he was God's unrecognized gift to harbor pilots. He knows these waters like the route to grandmother's house. He tells the skipper not to worry, that he and his ol' man have done so much fishing off Lauderdale, that he (Mr. God's gift to navigation) could lay us alongside wearing a galvanized bucket over his head. The skipper said,

"Damn glad to hear that... We're going in at night. Just need you to tell us which channel to take and we'll go in by lights and channel markers."

I was starboard lookout... No one asked my opinion because no one cared about my opinion... Because to have an opinion on the subject, I would have to have rented one or invented one and last, E-3s didn't have a dog in the fight. I did notice that when the Old Man said we were going in at night, our 'all-knowing' second class electrician's butt nearly chewed a hole in the material between his hip pockets. It is not every day that a non-rated guy gets to witness the Old Man in consultation with the ship's master bullshit artist... And swallowing large chunks of Alice in Wonderland pony dookey.

What was the worst thing that could happen? Run aground on some sandbar and spend a couple of weeks at the beach? What the hell!

After sundown, we began our approach... Right off the bat, Mr. 'know everything' popped a dent in his credentials...

"Ah, sir, I think the Flamingo Beach and Tennis Club should be right about there."

He pointed. We studied the area through 7x50s and unless the beach and tennis club had disguised itself as a tank farm next to some kind of surplus crap storage yard, the 'pathfinder of the sea' was a little off.

For the better part of the next 45 minutes, our second class Florida geography mate pointed out a whole lot of stuff nobody could verify.

Then he said it...

"Capt'n, somewhere out here is this great big concrete thing... We used to tie our boat to it and fish off it."

"BIG CONCRETE THING!?! ALL STOP... ALL BACK ONE THIRD! WHAT KIND OF BIG CONCRETE THING?"

Somewhere up ahead in this nocturnal crapshoot was this reinforced concrete structure... The highly practiced E-3 evesdropping ear immediately picked up the essentials... It was big... Somewhere between the size of a Greyhound bus and South Dakota... It wasn't painted. To six men standing in pitch black darkness, this clue didn't do a hell of a lot to solve the mystery. It was big... We already knew that.

It was out there... It was big... It was concrete and you could fish off it. That is, you could fish off it if it didn't have the hull of a fleet snorkle diesel boat wrapped around it.

"Bring up the Lucy light."

The Lucy light was one of the most valuable pieces of equipment on Requin. Lucy was a second class dental tech with a world class bosom. A smiling blond who belonged totally... Exclusively... Entirely... One hundred percent to all the guys 25 and younger on Requin who were not in permanent relationships. I've never quite figured out if Lucy was a super patriot who recognized the emotional sacrifice of our elite volunteer service or was just a high-capacity nymphomaniac. Whatever she was, she could distribute favors to three quarters of the duty section during a battery charge.

Naval regulations require that all personnel in the duty section remain on board to be immediately available if all the pier rats gang up with the intention of highjacking a worn out American submarine to trade to the Dutch for cheese. Alongside duty is the most boring thing on the planet, short of watching nightcrawlers mate.

To liven things up, darling Lucy, the patron saint of Hogan's Alley, would set up her playhouse in the back seat of somebody's car in the pierhead parking lot. At the same time, someone not then on watch would haul our xeon (sounds like 'zeeee-on') searchlight to the bridge and pedestal mount it trained on Lucy's nest of non-rated pleasure and wonderous delight. Then we would run an industrial electrical cord from the focused light mounted on the bridge to a power source in the conn, with a 'make

and break' toggle conveniently placed by the sail door where the guy standing topside watch could reach it.

Here's how it worked. When Lucy opened for business, lover #1 would latch onto a sharpshooter bucket and cross the brow, appearing to be heading for a trash dump. Upon reaching Lucy's luxurious love machine, Mr. numero uno would park the sharpshooter bucket next to the car to allow observation via attack scope to determine questions relating to 'vacancy' or 'no vacancy'.

Members of Lucy's love club knew the rule... No one visits Lucy without being passed the bucket... Thus, avoiding the embarrassment of mid-performance interruption.

Should the O.D. require the presence of the engaged crew member... The topside watch could flip the key on the Lucy light, creating a Zeus thunderbolt that would damn near blister a bare butt and set the upholstery on fire. Read by one understanding the linguistics of the after battery, this visual signal indicated that the presence of the duty wandering trash dumper was required. Please return with theatrical prop bucket.

There was a time when revelation of the foregoing could have resulted in its untimely demise... But with the end of the Cold War, Lucy's generous and willing contribution should not go unrecognized... And there are still middle-age coots who rode SS-481 in their previous incarnation who... On a quiet summer night can still smell that wonderful dime store perfume... Taste that red lipstick... And visualize rhinestone barets and stockings draped over a rear view mirror and life was good.

So there we were... Five men and petty officer Pinnochio standing on the bridge scanning the darkness for some large hardend cement object residing somewhere forward of bow bouyancy... Range and bearing not quite clear.

The Lucy light arrives... ILLUMINATION!!

There, two football fields away was this concrete formation the size of a couple of Texaco stations. Hit bows on at ten to fifteen knots, it would have been well capable of compressing the entire contents of the forward torpedo room along with most of the wardroom, up against the control room bulkhead.

I knew instantly that if God did not require bullshit artists to tell the truth every now and then... We would have french-kissed one hell of a load of reinforced concrete.

Lucy, this old bluejacket still loves you... Give anything to hear you shout,

"Yes... Yes... Oh, YES!!..." Into a Chevy ceiling light, one more time. .

Times Change by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The sub force has changed... The Navy has changed... Global priorities have changed and the days where nobody explained what was going on to an E-3 are gone.

Today's young men and women are informed and intelligent enough to understand the implications of strategic decisions and understand all the ramifications and downline effects. Most important, they care.

We didn't. One minute, Castro was a hero... Liberator of Cuba... The next minute he was a good for nothing, rotten sonuvabitch in need of a shave. I missed the whole process... Being in the boats was like being lost in space... You went underwater and a whole bunch of folks ran around changing stuff. Somewhere, Indo-China became Vietnam... Baseball teams played leapfrog all over the place... The Giants... The Braves... The White House changed hands... They fired men into space. We didn't really care... We were more concerned about clean skivvies... Finding a tub that we could crawl into for a 90 minute soak... Clean sheets... Cold beer and spending the night with something pretty and soft with a warm behind. Like Neanderthal man, we were taking care of the basics... God and John Kennedy could handle all the other stuff.

In our day, folks tended to stay in their own backyard. We didn't get involved in foreign social issues if they didn't look like they would reach a point necessitating the calling up of the Tennessee National Guard. We didn't understand Europeans... Fifteen years earlier, we had saved their collective butts from bogeymen the likes of which the world has never known... We fed the ungrateful sonuvabitches, cleaned up a lot of their mess and invited them to rejoin the family of man... And they rewarded us with learning just enough of our language to paint "Yankee Go Home" on anything that would stand still long enough for them to get a paintbrush on it. Someone told me it had to do with subtle cultural differences that would be impossible for anyone who had not been raised with their outlook and tradition, to understand.

That's a load... Any ignorant hayseed from the Tennessee backwoods can recognize ingratitude... Hell, those folks couldn't move in any direction without bouncing off white crosses representing a lot of good men who made a one-way trip to guarantee the worthless bastards would have the right to paint stupid stuff on vertical surfaces. I learned at eighteen, you didn't have to be an idiot to live in central Europe but it sure as hell ensured that you wouldn't be lonely.

Today, that wouldn't pass the U.S. global 'Don't piss anyone off' policy test. Today's modern bluejacket must come with an added dimension. The ability to swallow load after load of pure, unadulterated horseshit... Stomach it and move out. Better man than I was, Gunga Din.

To paraphrase the old smoke boat philosopher Cowboy, "We rode loose in the saddle."

We didn't know any better and if the truth be known, we figured it would always be that way. Opinions didn't take up much space... You could cram six million of them in Hogan's alley before it was necessary to pump 500 to forward trim.

We were what they call 'very low profile' today. When you consider the low number of us, I wouldn't use the term 'low profile'... Maybe we stopped short of a locust plague, but no one ever used the term 'shrinking violet' and submarine sailor in the same breath.

Times change... By age 25, life has deposited as much steel in your spine as you're likely to get and the course of patriotic journey has been charted indelibly in the control room of your heart.

I love to throw rocks at nukes... It's cheap fun, filled time on topside watch if you forgot your harmonica and needed batteries for your illegally bootlegged transistor radio... We threw rocks but we would have bled in our socks if we actually hit someone and hurt them.

Nukes. Let's face it... Nukes knew we old smoke boat guys were fast becoming eight-tracks in a CD world. We knew it... Hell, it didn't take a candygram from Albert Einstein to fill us in, so we tossed rocks... It was the American way.

Somewhere, Mitsubishi started making tape players and hair dryers. Men as old and wise as 'Old Gringo' can remember a day when the good little smiling faces at Mitsubishi brought you little fragmentation and incendiary presents from the sky... They conducted a mass present delivery on December 7, 1941... Mitsubishi products always looked best through the cross-hairs of a 40 millimeter sight. Who would have believed the day would come when American bluejackets would be buying junk made by Mitsubishi at the base Exchange, with no idea that the tiny rascals once turned out Zeros, Zekes and Bettys.

I think it's known as generational difference... Times change... People change... Americans, God bless 'em, have the shortest memory of anyone on the face of the earth. We have taken the concept of 'kiss and make up' to an extreme, bordering on absolute ridiculousness.

In Somalia one minute, Mohammed Adid was a low-life, black-hearted, back-stabbing warlord... The top fly crawling on the dungheap of corrupt excess and human misery. The next minute, he became our 'soapy shower pal'... Our diplomatic corps were tripping all over themselves to get in line to kiss his bony little fanny.

A naval officer told me, "That under the circumstances, it became necessary to refocus and cut our losses..."

To an old messcook deckape, not schooled in the nuances of international horseshit swapping, it looked like the biggest lad in school pissed in his pants and left the playground with a paperbag over his head.

That's what I mean... You lads, who wear the twin fish that make you my brother, have to find it in your heart to forgive an old half-baked, after battery rat and consider the source.

Times change... Most of the time for the better. Let me just give you one example. Members of the present naval establishment can transit the Hampton Roads Tunnel in both directions without seeing a big sign reading,

"DON'T THROW PEACOCK BUTTONS IN COIN HOPPER."

We Were Professionals by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Let it be recorded that never in the history of U.S. submarines was there a combination like Adrian Stuke and Dex Armstrong for a two-way deck dump in a state five sea.

Once outside the sail door, they were poetry in motion... Armstrong's number two garbage-passer position was largely responsible for Stukey's five Golden Gloves playing principal dumper.

The seas rolled... The trash flew... And all was right on God's great ocean.

(Inscription found on plaque in E-3 Hall of Fame.)

Banishing Boredom by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

When you live in a three hundred eleven-foot steel pipe, there isn't a whole helluva lot you can do for entertainment. We showed movies, played hearts, acey-ducey, chess, wrote stupid letters, told lies to each other, listened to our toenails grow, and accumulated bellybutton lint. We didn't rate a magician's mate or a pony ring. Life in the boats was very basic.

Sometime during a run, the animals would organize some kind of a tournament... Chess... Gin Rummy... Hearts. We would go through preliminary challenges... Leading up to the crowning of our grand champion, who would issue a challenge to the wardroom.

At this point, LT Schilling would come aft, clean our clock, declare himself the Master of the Universe and return forward. Didn't matter what game... LT Schilling always took all the marbles. He had been a raghat many years before and had an uncanny ability to unravel our plots and know when we were up to no good. No man ever understood the enlisted mind like Mr. Schilling.

We loved him... He was the best advocate for our great unwashed mob. When it came to saving a lad who had strayed over the line of regulation behavior, he made F. Lee Bailey

look like a rank amateur... He could extinguish the fires of Hell with some of the most convoluted logic from a silver tongue that never failed to amaze us all.

He would save you then waltz you aft and light you up like Joan of Arc... Blister you with a verbal bullwhipping that could make you feel so small, you could hide in a shot glass. His favorite line was,

"Armstrong, let me disabuse you of the idea that the United States Navy was created for your personal amusement... This is a Naval Vessel with important missions to be carried out in a responsible manner... Not a seagoing treehouse for idiots. When is that going to penetrate that thick skull?"

He would spend the better part of ten minutes reciting a littyany of your accumulated transgressions, stupid stunts and uncalled for abberant behavior. This is not to imply I was the singular recipient of his volcanic invective. The man could incinerate butts at an incredible rate but never once did he feed anyone to the UCMJ shark.

On nights when we had run out of mischief to get into... Nights when our stern tubes were dragging and we just couldn't muster the desire or energy necessary to stir up the barnyard, we camped out in the crew's mess and if riding surfaced, listened to the R.B.O.

Have no gahdam idea what 'R.B.O' stood for. It was a big radio with an amazing range of reception. Our favorite program was news in English on Radio Moscow. It was a hoot... Kind of like the poor man's peacetime Tokyo Rose... Nobody really cared about the number of tins of codfish the lovely ladies of the Murmansk Canning Factory turned out... We didn't care if they exceeded their quota... But we could picture Olga, the people's darling, leaving the plant stinking of codfish oil and meeting Ivan, sweatsoaked hero fresh off the assembly line at the manure spreader factory. It was always good for a few smiles.

The BBC brought you cricket matches. They could run for days. We figured there must be folks somewhere who cared... None on Requin. One night when we were beginning to run low on smokes, some clown brought in a couple of cartons of British cigarettes, called 'Player's Navy-Cut Cigarettes'.

For anyone out there who never had the amazing experience of firing up a Player's cigarette, let me enlighten you. The Brits figured out how to package 20 little paper tubes filled with Easter basket grass that tasted like Band-Aids off a mummy's toe. If anyone breaks out a pack, run like hell.

We had trading sessions. A big trade was a session where hundreds of girlie mags, skin books, novels, packs of smokes, and assorted junk changed hands. The entire after battery became a wierd bazaar... This was always good for some laughs... Especially when crew members would announce the wonderful contents of a dog-eared book everyone had owned at some point. More lies got told, in less time than at any other

time. For example, if a boat sailor wanted to unload *Alice in Wonderland*, he would tell you something along the lines of,

"Hey guys... Great book about a young virgin and all the wierd stuff that happens to her when she gets lost and has to do a lot of strange stuff to get home."

That kind of silly nonsense made it a helluva lot of fun. Sounds stupid now, but at the time it was a hoot. It provided a break in life regulated by light switches and watch cycles.

Being on the forward edge of western defense was as boring as hell. Not a whole lot different from mushroom farming or watching snails mate... It was your messmates that made it great. To those of us who call each oher 'shipmate' it holds wonderful memories... Original monkey business made life worth living. We worked hard... We performed our jobs very perfessionally and gave the boat a good reputation for dependability and performance... They used us a lot because we were good at what we did. I never fully understood what the big picture was... Or what contribution we made in winning the Cold War... Other than giving the finger to Russian ships at sea... The Portachenko salute.

But we knew Arliegh Burke had the big picture and that was good enough for us... Granted, there were times when we thought we might take a run out to the pay phone at the head of the pier... Phone him up and get the straight dope. But who knows? We might have caught him on one of those big admiral trading nights. We heard those guys unloaded complete sets of the Encyclopedia Britannica, Gutenberg Bibles and original oil paintings by Michaelangelo showing Rickover explaining stuff to God.

Nah, Admiral Arleigh would have been hawking a first edition of *Swamp Girl* and loving every minute of it.

Liberty in the Land of Oz by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The old salt at the recruiting station said,

"Kid, the United States Navy will take you to faraway places with strange sounding names... Exotic places they don't tell you about in high school geography books... You'll see stuff and do things you never dreamed of... The 'keys' to this kingdom will be your I.D. and Liberty Card."

This was probably the only truthful thing that the sonuvabitch said all day.

"Okay, listen up... Check your I.D. and Liberty Cards... Last boats will be leaving the landing at 2400... Got that sweethearts? You ain't got your worthless butts parked in a launch by midnight... You better have money for a water taxi or be one gahdam Olympic swimmer... You got that?... Now, the Captain wants a few words..."

"Stand at ease gentlemen... I will expect you older men to look out for your younger mates. Show 'em the ropes and keep 'em off report. And for God's sake, don't let 'em pick up anything Doc Rohr can't cure."

"Doc, you got any wisdom you wish to impart before these fine young bluejackets go ashore as ambassadors for the Land of Moderation and Proper Behavior?"

"Gentlemen, they have girls over there with germs the size of Japanese Beetles... Little dark-eyed darlings with stuff residing under those bright colored skirts that'll have you tying knots in urinal plumbing in three days. I'm not a licensed physician, but I've seen a lot of stuff that eats Blue Ointment for breakfast and you couldn't kill with a 45... The going rate for a cargo of human misery is two hundred Pesetas... Keep it in mind."

The old recruiter never said anything about that stuff...

"Okay gents, launch will be laying alongside in ten... See you at morning chow... Wanna see every damn one of you... Requin sailors take care of Requin sailors... You got that?"

And over the side we went to peek into the world of exotic life, of strange custom and the opportunity to get rolled by some of the most devious practitioners of the art that ever lived.

It always started with a shipmate saying,

"Let's see if we can find a place to catch a couple of cold ones"

Five minutes in any cantina in Panama was enough to tell an eighteen-year old he'd come a long way since the Senior Prom. While your old buddies from high school were hitting the books at State U. or chasing little pony-tailed darlings around the juke box at the corner pizza joint... Here you were, tossing down suds in a flea-infested gin joint where everyone talked funny and smiled at you through teeth with a lot of deferred dental work. But, it was good to be off the boat and have the opportunity to flush your kidneys with something other than coffee and bug juice.

"Hey signor, you want to trade watch?"

"No thanks Chico... My mom gave it to me."

After six beers, you can sell damn near anything to an E-3 boat sailor.

Ask Old Gringo... A 'three sheets to the wind' TM striker will shell out his hard-earned loot for everything from a fake shrunken head to an autographed picture of God. We all left our brains in beer glass rings... You could sell an after battery alley rat a nude photo of Eleanor Roosevelt. I once paid five bucks to see a couple of dogs' dance. Remember

that at the time, I wasn't the only Requin sailor in the place and that at the time, I thought it was really neat.

Later in life, I bought a boatload of shares of something called Petro-Lewis... My money ended up in the same place and I didn't get to see dogs do the Mambo. The guy who said 'A fool and his money are soon parted' must've been a boat sailor in SUBRON Six.

Women who operated in the Twilight Zone of Naughty Behavior were 'painted ladies' and 'fallen angels' in the vernacular of back-home Sunday school teachers. Good lads didn't mingle with hoochie-coochie gals. Good lads from East Tennessee rarely had the opportunity to traffic in hooch n' cooch in faraway locations beyond the jurisdictional limitations of good little boy behavior.

Once the door to Aladdin's Cave had opened enough for us to squeeze in, we intended to sample all the delights on a 'full speed ahead and damn the consequences' basis.

I saw dancing dogs, a chicken fight... A drunk Chief ride a mad ox... A shipmate pee on the Shore Patrol from the top of a palm tree... I saw two guys from a boat out of Charleston, pull a fire alarm and fill up a bar with Argentine firemen... Saw a prostitute with 'VIVA CASTRO' tattooed over her left nipple... Saw a live llama not in zoo... Iguanas... A man skin a snake and eat it raw... Saw a one-legged woman riding a bike... And Stuke and I saw a grown woman do something with a ping pong ball that remains to this day, the number one thing on my list of weird stuff I've witnessed.

I have no idea what kind of liberty the guys pull today. I hope that they are still allowed to nibble around the edges and sow the oats of young men's fantasies fulfilled... I hope that white hats can still be found on tables where for fifteen cents, you can buy rum and alligator piss, under a worn out ceiling fan while weird music blares from a beat-up juke box. Where girls who never owned a bra, can slip a cigar band on your finger and marry you for two hours and make you forget bad air, midwatches and Navy regs in magic moments with high humidity.

And an old boat sailor hopes you always make that 2400 launch... And your wife never finds out half the stuff you did.

The Men Who Wore Peacoats by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I was enlisted... Have no idea what it feels to be commissioned... Never was. Like circus acrobats, if you never did it, how in th' hell would you have any idea what it felt like?

I always felt we did the heavy lifting... We fixed sick ships... We shoved the fish in the tubes... We fed each other... We were the muscle and guts that brought the boat to life. I have always felt more comfortable sharing coffee and trading lies with the men who wore dungaree shirts and slept in shared racks. They were my friends and made me one of them. For that I will be eternally grateful.

When I watch the old Victory at Sea films... I look for the powder-blackened 40mm Bofor gun crews slamming five round clips into the breech and pouring it into Jap aircraft. I look for the grinning kid standing at the breech door of an 21-inch tube in the forward room... Standing there stripped to the waist, streaming sweat... He gets a six-foot smile and pats the tube door just as someone in the conn squeezes the pickle and a Mark 14 takes off on a run that will come to an abrupt end against a hull containing sonuvabitches who will soon be sucking salt water.

Gun crews... Torpedo gangs... Cooks in grimy aprons... Grease-covered snipes with a bandanna hanging out of a hip pocket... Radiomen... Electricians in battery acid-eaten dungarees... My kind of people.

On Pennsylvania Avenue, there is a Navy memorial... If you get to DC, make it a must on your sightseeing list... You won't find a bust of Nimitz or John Paul Jones... You will find a life-size representation of a raghat with his peacoat collar turned up and his seabag, with that look in his eye we all remember... That look that said,

"Hey world, you name the game... Pick out your chunk of ocean and we'll find you and whip your ass."

That cocky look only U.S. bluejackets have.

Loved it... Everyone in every seaport on the globe knew when the Americans came in. We brought that little American touch, a combination of pride and good times.

Most of my friends and present day professional associates talk of their alma maters... Princeton, Yale, Harvard, NYU, Penn State... A boatload of techs... You name it and somebody went there. I graduated from SUBDIV 62 of SUBRON SIX... You could list my credentials on the bottom of a Krispie Kreme doughnut box... My classmates were unshaven raghats who were the smartest, most heads-up folks I was ever around.

I have no idea how the submarine force selection process worked, but worked it did... They sifted through bus loads of idiots and came up with us.

This time of year, officers sit by a cozy fire in their three-car garage, ten-room retirement homes and address beautiful five bucks a pop Hallmark cards to those they served with...

"Jack, how are you, Ruthie and the boys? Guess Jack Jr. is close to graduation at the Academy. Did George pass the Bar? It has been too damn long. If you ever get to Florida, ring us up. Alice joins me in conveying best holiday wishes, Pete."

Not so us... We punch up Rontini's cyberspace boxing ring and spend hours telling each other what worthless, good-for-nothing reprobates we are. A fact long established and universally recognized.

How many of you had to sit your lovely wives down and explain why some guy named so-in-so (ss) in San Francisco... Better yet, Reno, Nevada, calling you a rotten smoke-eating, uncouth sonuvabitch, is a good thing... Not a bad thing. No... It's an enlisted thing. Was, is and hopefully always will be, a wonderful thing.

Some nights after I click off Rontini's magic demolition derby, I walk around sporting ten or twelve skillfully placed harpoons hanging out of my ass... Placed there by great shipmates I have yet to buy a beer. Officers don't do that... Ain't polite. They make long distance calls to talk about the weather... They never turn on their home computers to find that Cowboy wants to know if their parents ever got married or just simply to let you know how his donkey herpes is coming along.

They will never read a line from Old Gringo on Veteran's Day that goes...

"They will be forever young..."

And have a silent finger trace 'God bless them all' on the inside of a most grateful heart.

They will never know the joy of Ray Stone crashing through their front door yelling,

"HEY DEX, TURN ON RONTINI!! THE NUKES ARE TYING HANGMAN'S KNOTS IN LYNCHING ROPE! YOU SILLY BASTARD, YOU CAN'T BUY INSURANCE TO COVER A LOS ANGELES BOAT SURFACING IN YOUR JOHN AND BLOWING YOU AWAY!"

We then laughed like kids and started whittling another stick to poke in another hornet's nest. We got our battle cry from Patty Wayne,

"Hyman Rickover... Anti-Christ... Yaddah Yaddah, Sis Boom Bah!"

"That..."

Says Olgoat,

"Is Latin for 'Blow it out yur ass.'"

If you wore shoulder boards, you missed a lot... The action all took place aft of the control room. While you guys were reading the Wall Street Journal, doing crossword puzzles and cheating each other at gin rummy, mutinies were being considered, diabolical plots were unfolding and stupid stunts were being planned. Grown men were insulting each other... Cooks were being ragged... Towel fighting world championships... The virtues of tit size were being academically discussed... Lousy coffee was being consumed and sea stories were being told under the guise of pure naval history.

We had to read Tom Clancy to figure out what went on up forward.

Home Sweet Home by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The single guys, the lads to whom the ship was, in point of fact, the only residence these fellows had, became identified as the 'Boys from Requin'. Requin was the only home we had... It was our 'old girl'... It was our address and the place where what little earthly effects we had were stored in bunk bags and side lockers. When the married guys went over the side to spend what little domestic time they had with family and friends, we were left with the care and cosmetic maintenance of the old girl.

Requin was no teenage dolly as boats went in those days. The old girl was the naval equivalent of a can-can girl who was rapidly losing her high kick and whose bloomers had been patched so many times there was no doubt of her veteran status. She had been converted to a radar picket in the '40s and converted back to a straight 'SS' boat at the end of the '50s... They gave her a high sail (conning tower fairwater), one of those high fiberglass monstrosities held together by a zillion monel metal bolts. They left the old fleet boat bullnose... You know the raked bow with the identifying hawser hole above bow buoyancy. She looked sharp... Still does, floating in retirement in Pittsburgh.

We, the single guys, were proud of her. Oh sure, we cussed her a lot... She could be an ornery gal... But she was our ornery gal... We were man and wife, compliments of the United States Navy.

When we came in, the old girl always looked like hell. We held the world rust-stain record. The Requin could develop rust runs in a heavy fog... You could chip, grind and wire brush the gahdam limber holes, zinc chromate the bastards for three days and slap on three coats of number seven gray and a thousand yards past the lightship, rust made its appearance. And we, the deck force, owned all the rust.

Requin was a floating graduate school in rustology. While we were working like galley slaves to earn our Dolphins, we were minoring in rustology. We were the best rustologists in the fleet... We fought oxidation day and night. I am firmly convinced that without us, the boat would have been reduced to red powder and could have been carried away in a shopping bag.

The fiberglass sail did not rust... It peeled. Paint peeled off in Life magazine-sized chunks. Under the #7 gray, it was green... Stupid translucent green. When the paint fell off, you could see light through the inside of the sail. We wondered why the bright minds that thought up the Nautilus, couldn't have invented gray 'no paint' fiberglass. What the navy has always needed was a savvy leading seaman on their shipbuilding staff.

We weren't geniuses but we had a lot of exposure to the major problem.

"Stuke... How come the guys who invented no-paint aluminum siding couldn't come up with a solution to superstructures and salt water?"

"Because Einstein, you'd be outta work. Whacking rust is a navy tradition... Someday it'll be a plastic navy... You wouldn't like it. Steel boats and iron bluejackets... That's boat service... Gotta be that way."

He was right... Usually was. Progress always means change and change has a way of destroying the things you associated with the life you loved. Making things better and easier makes life different. We always loved the way it was. I never could imagine a day when a submarine pier wouldn't be crawling with paint-spattered kids in acid-eaten dungarees... Rust brought us a lot of our memories.

After a long day of dancing with the Wicked Witch of Rapid Oxidation, we would knock off and lay below. We would help the duty messcook... We only used one messcook in port... The two lads assigned to the job, alternated for the evening meal. One hit the beach, the other peeled spuds and set up. We would draw a cup of coffee, grab a paring knife and help the messcook knock the hides off a few spuds and figure out what flick we'd watch that night.

The OD usually came aft and watched the movie with us... That's boat service.

The squadron yeoman was a great guy... The best. The old rascal would come down and bum stuff. In the old days, officers got a ration allowance... They pooled their bucks and bought the stuff they ate on board or they could forgo the allowance and eat whatever the animals ate. On Requin, the wardroom ate what we ate. I always admired them for that... We were one crew.

The squadron yeoman would go from boat to boat scrounging stuff for the squad dog's pantry. A good squadron yeoman knew everything we needed to know... Make that, wanted to know... We traded coffee and canned hams for straight dope... Underway assignments were worth a lot of groceries.

In our day, before the days of 'political correctness', whatever the hell that is... In those days, yeomen were called 'tit-less waves' and the squadron yeo was the #1 tit-less wave. He would drop down the after battery hatch...

"What's for chow?"

"Wazzit to you, you gahdam leech?"

"Is that any way to talk to the only friend you bastards have on Orion?"

"You're right, Chief... Only the duty section aboard. We've got beef stew, spuds and Rat's famous horse biscuits tonight."

"Can you fit in an old beached Chief?"

"We can if you can fill us in on what we'll be doing next month."

"Now gentlemen, I don't need to tell you that's closely held info."

"Bullshit Chief... What's it gonna cost us?"

"Yeah Chief, what's the going rate for finding out who's going south on LANTFLEX?"

"Got a canned ham?"

"Yeah, a canned ham if it's us... A can of Spam if it's the gahdam Grampus!"

That was typical raghat mole intelligence. We had SUBRON 6 wired. Between yeo and the pier head laundry truck... Old Hop Sing, the chink spy, we usually could unravel the future. Not to mention Thelma at Bells... Thelma knew damn near everything.

I recently learned something at a Carp reunion. I learned it 40 years too late. Some Carp sailor found a way to keep Thelma from taking swallows from your beer... Seems he would call for a draft and when Thelma would bring the glass over, he would toss in his false teeth. Why didn't we figure that out? If the word had ever gotten out, the local funeral home would have done a great business in no longer needed dentures.

Evening chow alongside was a relaxed affair, after which we would show a movie... Maybe two... Hell, sometimes we would declare a movie marathon and go all night. We were young... All-night movies seemed like a good idea at the time. We weren't worth a damn the next day, so we usually let rust take the day off. Movies alongside were the best... Plenty of room. We'd break out chow... Popcorn... Interrupt the film with wisecracks, inappropriate remarks and comments on various female anatomical features. Like scout camp the day your scoutmaster was sick. The inmates took over the asylum... For a night.

Around 2200, someone would take up a collection and make a burger run.

"Cheeseburgers and Last Train to Gun Hill in the after battery in ten minutes. Old Maid game aft... Dutch said to bring lots of Old Maid tokens and folding certificates... Anyone bunking in the after battery who desires uninterrupted sleep, better grab a rack in the forward room... Duty section declaring movie marathon... Ten minutes... Bring your own smokes!"

An all-nighter... Great.

Home was great. The address was always 481 and pier 22 was always home plate. The neighborhood changed regularly but the front yard was always the North Atlantic.

Dress Canvas Topside by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In the smokeboat service, there was a marked absence of formal ceremony. It was

called the 'dungaree navy' and it didn't care a whole helluva lot for 'peacock strutting' or doing the dance of the fifty doo-dahs for visiting surface royalty and transient brass. We took care of our own... Took care of business and let the other elements of the forces afloat do whatever it was they did.

We had no ritualized 'uniform of the day'... Our uniform of the day was simply whatever you had in your bunk or side locker that didn't smell like a saddle blanket off a Billy goat.

We wore black high top boondocks known on Requin as 'Mammy Yokums', after the weird boots worn by the old weather-beaten granny in the Snuffy Smith hillbilly comics. Some lads from the west wore cowboy boots called 'shitkickers'. I wore Mammy Yokums... Alcatraz loafers.

They were fairly watertight, damn near indestructible and created a fashion statement that drove the Orion master at arms nuts. If you wanted instant entertainment, just carry a message up to some clown in the Orion wardroom decked out in a faded dungaree shirt with the sleeves rolled up, a non-regulation wool ball cap with Dolphins pinned in front, red lead-spattered Mammy Yokums, and acid-eaten dungaree pants.

"Hold up son, where in the hell do you think you're going?"

"Officer's country, Chief..."

"Jeezus Christ! You look like you crawled out of the ragbag... You ever hear of uniform of the day?"

"Heard about it... Not sure I know what'n the hell it is."

"Well horsefly, it ain't what you're decked out in... Take my word."

"Well, it passes for the daily uniform in the operating, go-to-sea navy."

"Son, there's no gahdam way you're entering our wardroom dressed for the ragpicker's ball."

"Okay with me... Let me give you this message from my skipper and I'll tell our Old Man that the tender fashion police nabbed me and will handle our boat business... Here, this goes to Captain Rice, SUBRON Six."

"Hell, I don't want that... Listen horsefly, I'm going to pretend I never saw you... You don't know me... I don't know you... Just haul your raggedy ass out of my sight... Son, if anyone asks you what navy you're in, do me a favor and tell them you're a Mexican Sea Scout."

In the pre-nuke days, it was easy to identify a boat sailor... He always had little light yellow dots in the crown of his white hat, readily identified as hydraulic oil, which previously belonged to some overhead operating vent gear. You could wash the damn thing with Clorox and never get it all out.

On rare occasions, we would form up topside aft of the conning tower fairwater in dress canvas... Class 'A' uniform... Shined shoes... Reg neckerchief and clean white hats. We looked sharp... Any sailor, who tells you he didn't feel thirty feet high and bulletproof standing topside where God and all the Orion brown-baggers could see your Dolphins and how proud he felt, must be one cold-hearted sonuvabitch.

I remember a visit by vice admiral Elton W. Grenfell, COMSUBLANT... The Big Sea Daddy of the East Coast Underwater Navy. Admiral Grenfell was the gent camped out on the apex of the submarine big cheese pyramid in our force. He was a great sailor who took care of his bluejackets.

I was a sideboy when he arrived... Stokes, our skivvy-waver (signalman) piped him aboard.

After the admiral was aboard and the customary wardroom greetings had been exchanged and handshakes all around, they dismissed the sideboys and we took our place in the two rows of ranks assembled aft. We were sharp and silent... All you could hear was the gentle popping of the ensign aft, the nylon Squadron Six pennant (burgee) and the Division 62 pennant. Funny, I can always recall the sound of that gentle popping nylon... Day... Night topside watch... Always that light snapping in the breeze... It's the 'common denominator' in my memory. It was a big part of the life I loved... Cups of coffee shared with my forever mates and nylon popping.

Admiral Grenfell passed down our ranks...

"What's your name, son?"

"Stuke, sir."

"Where are you from?"

"Quincy, Illinois, sir."

"Where's Quincy?"

"Six hundred miles outside your 72 radius."

The admiral smiled... Anyone who ever met Stuke immediately liked him... You couldn't help it.

"What is Quincy known for, son?"

"The finest thing the sub force ever got, sir."

"And what would that be?"

"Me, sir."

I stood there waiting for Grenfell to wring his neck... My running mate was a total idiot.

"Well seaman, the next time you get to Quincy, tell 'em to send us some more."

He moved on.

"What's your name, son?"

"Armstrong, sir."

"Where are you from?"

"Arlington, Virginia, sir."

"Navy feeding you okay?"

"Three weeks out it 's still bug juice and mystery meat, sir."

Dress canvas topside in the company of fine men and seagulls crapping on fresh pressed blues... It never got any better than that.

Bells, The Center of the Universe by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There was a diesel days definition for contentment... Racked out in the middle rack inboard... Riding in the wake of a carrier... Reading a sex book and scratching your athlete's foot on a bunk chain... It never got any better than that. Not unless someone could figure out how to run the boat aground on a nudist beach.

In port, there was Bells... Sign read 'Bells Bar and Naval Tailors' but to us it was just Bells. You could be sliding away from a pier in East Jeezus, Balookastan and yell to another SUBRON Six boat,

"See you bastards in Bells!"

And every bluejacket on both boats knew exactly what you meant.

Someone recently asked,

"Is there a good submarine bar in Norfolk... Like the Horse & Cow?"

Have no gahdam idea what the Horse & Cow is, was or may be in the future... But there was a time when Bells was the center of the submersible bluejacket's world. If Thelma's signature wasn't on your qual card, you simply weren't a qualified boat sailor. Look under 'Filthiest head in North America' in the Guinness Book of World Records and all it has is 'Bells, Hampton Blvd.'

Bells is gone... But sure as hell not forgotten. Each year, thousands... Possibly hundreds of thousands of old, worn out smoke-eating, gravel gut, rock-crusher propulsion submariners appear at the hallowed site... It has become a religious pilgrimage.

Most people just see a big ol' asphalt parking lot. But a real, genuine SUBRON Six man can close his eyes and smile as it all comes back.

In the background, Johnny Cash is singing 'Don't Take Your Guns to Town' from the most abused jukebox in North America. Thelma is yelling,

"Which gahdam tables want the two pitchers... Four drafts... And the Slim Jims?"

"Hey Thelma... Darling... Sweetheart... Fulfillment of all my fantasies and dreams... What does it take for a valiant defender of the free world to get a pack of Beer Nuts?"

"Nuts? I'll give you nuts... You don't pipe down, I'll kick your nuts up next to your eyeballs!"

It was very evident that Thelma never attended Vassar, right off.

"I'm only gonna say this once tonight, boys... Keep the gahdam wet glasses off the f*cking pool table felt!"

The pool table had a playing surface that was later used as a topographic model for the Ho Chi Min Trail. You could gently place a ball in the middle of the table... Release it and watch it do a drunken wobble toward whichever side of the table was closest to the equator. You could be a world champion pool hustler and lose at Bells... The secret was knowing how to bank shots off mole tunnels and avoid gopher holes... It was green and it resembled a table.

Bells was noted for four-star cuisine... If you were a Slim Jim gourmet or an authority on Beer Nuts, pickled pig's feet, hard-boiled eggs, and hot Polish sausage that floated in liquid that could dissolve a medium cruiser turret, Bells was your kind of place. I was told that Bells' Polish sausage was the subject of a heated debate in the 1964 Geneva arms reduction talks... The only thing I know from actual contact was that they could set the seat of your 'Fruit-of-the-Looms' on fire the next morning.

Yes, as you stand there in that empty parking lot, it all comes back. You would think that the city fathers of Norfolk... Once the home of those reckless warriors of the

deep... Those protectors of the American way... Those drunken leap-froggers of parking meters... Out of respect, they should install a chrome floor drain, so we could pee down it just like everyone did every Saturday night... Hell, it might be so popular, Norfolk could hold the 'Festival of the Floor Drain'.

Did the Horse & Cow have a sign over the bar that read 'Sailors and dogs keep off the female employees'? Could you get your uniform steamed and pressed at the Horse & Cow while you sat in the bar in socks, skivvies and white hat, drinking beer? Did kids there go around with a box and a tin can hanging around their necks saying,

"Buff 'em up, motherf*ck? One fine shine... One thin dime?"

Is there a Thelma equivalent to yell,

"I'll kill the next sonuvabitch who drops a quarter in that gahdam thing and punches La Bamba five times!"

Do they have that?

If you call for a cab... When you tell them what bar you want them to come pick you up from, do they say,

"Are you shitting me? I wouldn't come down there with a large caliber handgun."

When you sit down at your table in this Cow place... Does a big blond come over and plant two great big warm ones between your shoulder blades... Lean over and whisper,

"What are we havin' tonight, sailor boy?"

Hell, maybe they've franchised Bells and named 'em after farm animals... Who knows? The secret giveaway would be the floor drain in the men's room... And the sign over the door reading, 'ALL THIS WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE DEVOTED PATRONAGE OF THE DRUNKS OF SUBRON SIX'.

The Great Dempsty Dumpster Fight by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Anyone remember "The Great Dempsty Dumpster Fight" on the Fleet Landing in Bermuda, spring of '60 or '61?

There were 10 to 15 boats in. By the time most of 'em pulled in, all sorts of surface craft were nested at the base pier. So, the boats 'dropped hardware to swing the hook' out in the bay. They set up a liberty launch circuit for the lads in the liberty sections... And everything looked cool.

Some mental giant called for the liberty boats to quit running at 2330, so by 2300 the fleet landing was jammed solid with red-blooded American bluejackets in varying states of intoxication. A jolly crowd of drunks milling about with nothing to do but wait for the Orion coxswains to lay their boats alongside.

There was a Dempsey Dumpster on the pier. Some simple sonuvabitch from SUBRON 6 climbed up on it and yelled, "I'm King of the Dumpster Derby!!" It was like nuclear fission - the gahdam pier went nuts.

Members of the United States Undersea Service - known as the 'diesel boat navy', were not given the training in the social graces that today's lads are obviously given. But then, given the amenities of a nuke boat, it's hard to distinguish them from the Princess Cruise Lines - - kind of like Diving Love Boats.

Riding the old "Take her down to six-five feet and report your leaks" boats was like living in a septic tank that served great chow. We didn't have orchestras, saunas, a promenade deck, visiting magicians, and people who understood anything remotely resembling medicine (Rumor was that the corpsman on the Redfin was an ex-Guatemalan root doctor).

I have always been proud that I wore diesel dolphins. I was probably too damn stupid for the 'moonbeam navy', but I can always say I was 'dungaree navy' before they tamed it.

Went to see some movie about the moonbeam navy. The OOD said... very calmly... "Make your depth 2,000..." TWO THOUSAND??? On the boat I rode, the entire crew would have been wearing the boat like a peacoat before we hit a thousand!

Also, there was no haze in the boat... No cigar smoking COB in the control room. What kind of a boat sailor believes in air the sonuvabitch can't see? I'll bet the coffee on one of them moonbeam boats doesn't even come with a rainbow colored hydraulic oil slick floating in it... And some old coot with a hundred and fifty hashmarks and the I.Q. of Tweety Bird saying, "Don't worry kid, stuff's okay... Hydro oil will lubricate yer gizzard." Nuke sailors don't have gizzards... They get their gizzards circumcised.

Did you know those bastards tore down the diving tower at New London? No lie. How does a drunk know how to find the base now? Jeezus, is nothing sacred? I guess if you escape below 2000, when you reach the surface they stuff you in a shot glass, so the solution is tear down the tower. I asked some teenage Chief,

"What'd you guys do with the escape tower?"

"Tore it down... It was useless."

Well, damn. Would you demolish the statue of liberty because Victoria Secret didn't approve of her breast size? Doesn't the term "Historic Landmark" translate into moonbeam linguistics?

Where was I? Oh, yeah... Some idiot was up on the Fleet Landing dumpster doing his damndest to toss his fellow citizens off. If you got tossed off on one side, you were lucky... You had a twenty foot trip and landed in the water. On the three other sides, it was an eight foot drop to an abrupt landing on a concrete pier. Never had so much fun, even after the posse arrived. It made you want to re-enlist... Where else can grown men re-enact a third grade playground fight and get away with it? For weeks, men bragged "I was king of the dumpster for eight seconds...." For the rest of my time in SUBRON 6, all time was calculated from the Big Dumpster Fight in Bermuda.

After the posse got things under control and rounded everyone up, some four-striper decided we needed a midnight pep talk.

"You men... Look at yourselves, you're a disgrace... Grown men... Men the Navy has deemed worthy of entrusting the operation of some of the world's most sophisticated equipment..."

He couldn't have been talking to anyone on Requin. We had a busted toaster, a screwed up LORAN and damn near all the hatch gaskets leaked. Anyhow, this land-based captain told us we should be ashamed of ourselves...

"You men... Look at yourselves... Torn uniforms, missing white hats... Dirty and filthy..."

Of course, rarely does the Navy form-up a returning liberty party and hold a pass-in-review for the CNO... Crissakes, it was midnight... He should have been proud that more than half of us could still stand up!

Well Ray, when they scrapped the old fleet snorkels, something died. Don't know exactly what, but it was tied to being part of a band of brothers... A buccaneer fraternity that prided itself on not being bolted too securely to the planet. But we knew when it came to driving and fighting iron ships beneath the sea... We were the best.

Whatever Happened to the After Battery Rat?

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

We're getting to be fewer and fewer. You know you're part of a thinning organization when guys you used to pull liberty with start showing up on the Discovery Channel, explaining life on petroleum powered submersibles in the days before the gahdam moonbeam navy.

Went to see one of those recently released submarine films... You know the one... "The U.S.S. Gee Whiz SSN-So-In-So goes to 40,000 feet"... And the mind-reading skipper does perfectly timed wiggle-waggle moves to elude M.I.T. designed underwater ordinance made in China under a deal made with Bill Clinton.

The crew has clean, neatly tailored and pressed dungarees. The wardroom gentlemen all wear ties or ascots, the cook has a clean apron and the Chief of the Boat uses the term, "Yowee, that hurts!" when he inadvertantly drops an anvil on his big toe.

What's happened to the submarine force? What did they do with the old After Battery Rats? What happened to Monday morning quarters... Where it was like an Easter Parade of hangovers? And what ever happened to the Chief Petty Officer whose vocabulary contained descriptive adjectives and pronouns that could blister paint and embarrass house plants? Where did these guys go? If they're dead, Hell must be overcrowded. I've noticed that Ray Stone's still around, although plans are currently underway to embalm and stuff him for the Smithsonian... The plaque will read, "Ray 'Olgoat' Stone, TM Chief... Worthless Good for Nothing Sonuvabitch and Qualified Man." Not much of a testimonial to serve as prototypical illustration of today's modern Navyman, but a fine example of how it was possible to fold, bend, spindle and mutilate just about every rule in the book, make it through an enlistment without getting hung or shot, then somehow end up as a Chief in the process.

Ah, the Cold War... Where grown men went to sea in leaky boats with obsolete, no longer available parts... To smoke five cents a pack, ten year old 'instant ash' cigarettes, read socially unacceptable literature and all for a wage scorned by the Shanghai Coolie union.

Boat sailors. Hell, you could always spot a old SUBRON SIX man... He smoked Pall Malls, Camels, Raleighs, or some other nonfiltered thing carried in his sock next to his ankle... Wore foul weather gear often mistaken for used leper bandages found floating in the Ganges River... Cuffs on his blue jumper unbuttoned and rolled back one turn, so his 'liberty cuffs' stood out like port n' starboard running lights.

And cooks... Would never have admitted it at the time, but they were the best damn cooks in the Navy. Sonuvabitches could marinate a gahdam rubber boot and cook it so it tasted great. Rodney A. Johnson, aka 'Rat' Johnson... If you ever stood midwatch on the Requin when Rat was night baker, and he started cooking his famous "Git-yer-gahdam hands off'em" cinnamon buns... Hell, you'd be chewin' chunks out of the T.B.T. before he got the first batch clear of the oven.

You have to wonder, do nuclear boats have freckle-maker heads and sanitary tanks? Or do they have little 'Poop in the Bags' with self-sealing envelopes that they leave at the mail buoy?

Not to brag, but the author remains one of the few (limited number) individuals who while serving as an honored member of ships' company, found himself a grand prize

winner in the "Who gets to Visit the Inside of Number Two Sanitary Tank" contest... I wish I could find words to describe the wonder and magic of that award winning tour.

What ever happened to sailors who could find something to bitch about with a mouthful of tit? Not whining mind you, but 'creative complaining'... The art of going out of your way to find insignificant molehills to jack into mountain ranges. It was all part of submarine duty.

What happened to officers named, "Big Mike" Mahoney, Slade Cutter, "Blackjack" Richardson, and "Dutch"? The new guys are called Peyton, William, Ruppert, and Reginald. Call some sonuvabitch "Ruppert" in the late 50s and you could count on some large piece of bar furniture being wrapped around your ears.

Oh, and one other thing... How come submarines in the movies never have dog shacks or visible topside watches? Where in th' hell do they go to light cigarettes... And what do they hide behind when they take a midnight whiz on the tanktops? Who signs for the Krispie Kreme donuts? If they've gone and replaced topside watches with some kind of Buck Rogers "Welcome Aboard" robot contraption, who gets the word to the guys below that some gal with some very serious sweater pups is standing on the pier? "Doesn't the moonbeam navy care anymore?"

Well, for those of you who give a damn, Ray Stone, fully frozen in time... Varnished... And mounted on his own marble pedestal... Will be on display in the Smithsonian Museum of Old Barnacle-Encrusted Junk, in the 'Nasty Bastard' collection. And the next time the History Channel runs a special on "USN submersibles before they were named after locomotives, and the ol' farts and geezers that rode 'em", turn on your VCRs 'cause I'll be in it.

The Snake Ranch by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

We rented a place at Ocean View. For those of you who never had the pleasure of operating out of C. E. Piers Norfolk, Ocean View was the prime cross-pollination area. If you couldn't get next to female flesh out there, then you needed an appointment with a plastic surgeon... Because you had to be one ugly sonuvabitch or you had major dental or hygiene problems.

Ocean View was the pilgrimage destination for every lunch pail girl from every mill town in the Carolinas. Any girl with a tube of lipstick, two pairs of clean cotton panties and a Greyhound bus ticket, eventually found her way to Ocean View - mecca of the Atlantic fleet... Home of the largest per capita population of totally irresponsible sonuvabitches with vast resources of disposable income, and an appreciation for sexual commingling on a grand scale.

In short, the place was, to put it mildly, a dump. Not an ordinary, run-of-the-mill dump, but a four star, major league, hazardous waste site... Home of the "World's Largest Collection of Empty Rolling Rock Bottles and Coed Bathtub."

The sign over the door read, "*COMANIMALANT HEADQUARTERS - HOGAN'S ALLEY FRANCHISE*" We worked some cumshaw deal over at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard and some yard bird made the sign for equal his weight in Maxwell House. The sign looked official... In fact, the sign was the only thing about our total arrangement that may have been considered acceptable.

Rent became a pain in the butt, so we sold stock, and created a set of regs.

1. You had to be single, third class or below.
2. Non-quals could buy in with absolutely no say in anything, until qualified.
3. No picking on non-quals at the Ranch.
4. No gahdam phone!! (We knew if we installed a phone, the duty officer would be calling us every time the Orion called for line handlers.)

Nobody above second class could know about the Ranch... If your mother had been captured by the Apaches or your dad won the Nobel prize, you were a dead man if someone came to get you. We were a sort of Masonic Brotherhood of Free Spirits with a totally non-regulation Shangri-La.

We took the screens out of the rear windows so we could spiral pass empty beer bottles out to our ever-growing backyard display.

We got mattresses from the shipyard and those tubular frames they used with stretched canvas for racks on tin cans. We through-bolted 3/4 inch plywood to the roof joist and two by tens supporting the deck... Rigged frame hooks and bunk chain hangers, and mounted 24 racks... 4 high, 12 to a bedroom. We were all 18 to 22, and wouldn't have known a building or electrical code if it hopped up and bit us in the butt.

We also wired the place. You'd think someone fresh out of some electrical rate "A" school would understand the danger of daisy-chaining drug store extension cords, up to six in a row. We had straight-wired three locations on the fuse box. When they remodeled the N. O. B. geedunk, Jack Pringle and "Bullet head" Jackson hijacked a large stainless steel refrigerator box... It held six cases of beer and had enough space left over to hold a VW bug.

We were young... We had no idea what normal electrical bills looked like... Our bill would have been normal for a Holiday Inn...

We consumed consumables, conducted research into the effectiveness of panty elastic, and read literature never even considered for the Pulitzer Prize. Some guys went fishing. They would bring back half-dead fish that would expire in the beer box. It later turned out that nobody knew how to gut fish.

"If you bastards think I'm gonna surgically remove stinking fish gizzards, you're crazy as Hogan's goat!"

Bill Rivers later confessed that prior to Great Lakes, the closest he'd been to fish had been boxes of Mrs. Paul's fish sticks. So, we had a vote. No more stinking stuff eyeballing you when you opened the beer box. It was the end of fishing expeditions.

If you couldn't round up female companionship, there was always a poker game. Straight poker, non-complicated five and seven card poker... No gahdam girl scout camp "high low, over and under, round and round, hippy dippy, all the red cards wild" bullshit. Straight cowboy movie, no crap poker. Some guy off the Kittiwake sat in on a game one evening... When it was his turn to deal, he said, "Let me show you a game my mother taught me one day when I had the mumps..." We tossed his idiot ass out the door.

We had 'Hat Night'... If you wanted to play cards on Hat Night, you had to wear some stupid hat. Jim Tripp had this green John Deere tractor hat. Buck stole some midshipman's hat... Kid gave him a ration of crap one day when he was standing a charge in the after engine house... Cost the kid his hat. For two weeks, all we heard from 'Annapolis Jack' was,

"Hey, any you guys seen my cover?"

Saw it every 'Hat Night'.

No TV. We did have a TV once, but a couple of fights broke out between the 'Rocky & Bullwinkle' crowd and the Huntley-Brinkley evening news watchers... We got rid of the TV.

Snake Ranches are wonderful places for the lower end of the submarine social spectrum - the After Battery Rat. You remember, the guys who hauled shitcans to the pier... Replaced locker lids... Made salad, washed dishes and made the popcorn for the all-night in port movie marathons. Stood topside watches and announced important stuff like the arrival of the gedunk truck, and, "Hey below... Need a hand with a cab full of drunks..."

Ever see the statue of the Lone Sailor in DC? He's an After Battery Rat... His damn peacoat collar is up. How many times did some old barnacle-encrusted E-8 coot yell,

"Hey sailor, turn that gahdam collar down... How long you been in this man's Navy?"

"30 minutes Mr. Sailor Man, and loved every second of it."

Route 460 by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In the old days going north out of the Norfolk area, you didn't have Interstate 64... And Interstate 95 existed only in the minds of futuristic thinkers. You had Rt. 460 and Rt. 17.

460 was as straight as an arrow and had some amazing places to visit. For some reason, boat sailors were partial to 460.

The main reason was Wright's Barbeque. There was this town called Zuni, Virginia... To call it a town is charitable... The "YOU ARE NOW ENTERING ZUNI" and the "YOU ARE NOW LEAVING ZUNI" signs were on the same post. The town consisted of a gas station, a package store (for those of you who live in states where you have private liquor stores - a package store is an Alcohol Beverage Control, or ABC store), a feed store, and Wright's Bar-B-Q.

For miles before you got to Zuni, there were tin signs nailed to trees, fenceposts, the sides of barns... Crissakes, if you could see a vertical surface, chances are someone had nailed one of those three little dancing pigs signs on it that read, "WRIGHT'S BAR-B-Q", "MOUTHWATERING PIT COOKED PORK", "10 MILES ON RIGHT".

They weren't lying, either. Guys on the boat would hear the "Set the Maneuvering Watch" word passed, look at their watches, smile and say, "Hell, we can make it to Wrights before the old gals lock the door."

Wrights employed ladies who were very senior citizens... Ladies who had reached the age where they were looking for a little side income to supplement their retirement checks. They wore black dresses with white aprons and had little white lace handkerchiefs pinned in their breast pocket... And, they wore hairnets. In the '50s, folks didn't care for big long hairs showing up in their chow, so the health authorities required that food service people cover their heads. Somewhere, they stopped doing that... With fast food being lukewarm, synthetic cardboard tasting crap, maybe long black waitress hairs have become the most nutritional part of the whole meal.

The old ladies loved us boat sailors... We called 'em 'Sweetheart', and we were all 'Darlin'. We brought them wierd presents from places the boat pulled into and we tipped on the level of the Oil Minister of Kuwait. These things probably contributed to our popularity. As I recall, racey lingerie from Smith's in Bermuda was always a big winner. Always had this vision of these old, over-the-hill haypounders out there in the east jeezus boondocks grabbing jumper cables for their pacemakers when granny came dancing into the living room wearing one of those abbreviated black see-through lace numbers. I'll bet old pappy damn near jumped out of his old claw hammer loop big mac overalls. Geriatric sex... The sub force spread a lot of joy.

Wrights made great barbeque... Crackerjack smoked pork. But, they made Bar-B-Q sauce too. Ladies would say, "Darlin', you want mild or hot sauce with that?" If you said "I'll take the hot sauce, you only did it once..."

Those sweet little old ladies had broken the code on vegetable-based napalm. They had invented a liquid you could use for heavy welding... The stuff they put under a sandwich bun could melt the fillings out of your teeth and make you buy asbestos skivvy shorts.

I loved Wrights... It's gone now - all that's left are a couple of faded 3 little pigs signs with peeling paint nailed to trees, spreading the lie that Wright's Bar-B-Q is 10 miles up the road...

There was a roadside peanut stand at Ivor Virginia. Sold giant croaker sacks full of roasted and boiled peanuts. It is amazing what kind of mess four submarine sailors and a 20 pound bag of fresh roasted peanuts can make inside of an automobile... For years after I left the boats, beer bottles and damn peanut shells kept appearing every time I hit the brakes hard.

The woman who operated the peanut stand was a big woman by any standard you could apply. She looked like she had mastered the art of locomotive swallowing... You could set up housekeeping in one of her bra cups.

One night, we kept seeing these billboards that read, "FUMAZONES KILL NEMATODES".

We looked at each other.

"What 'n the hell's a fumazone? And what do they have against nematodes, whatever 'n hell they are?"

We were enlisted non rated, so no one ever accused us of great overwhelming brilliance.

"Sounds like Greek names... Must be some serious stuff between some Greeks..."

We later learned that it was all about some chemical that cured cancer of the peanut root.

Well, being the creative raghats that we were, we invented words like 'fumanazonic physics' and 'nemanatodic compensation'... Words we could work into conversations with old Chiefs who would never admit that they had no gahdam idea what you were talking about.

"Hey Chief, when you went to "A" School, were you good in fumanazonic refractory multi-denominational iambics?"

"Hell yes... But I'm not here to give you ALL the answers... Time you learned the idea behind qualification is for you to go find the answers yourself..."

Not more than 10 minutes later, he'd link up with one of his old barnacle encrusted E-8 buddies..."

"Hey Jack, when you studied for your rate, you have any of that fumanazonic shit?"

Playing Pin-The-Tail on the goat locker was a big part of the fun.

Nobody takes 460 anymore. A lot of old coots died smiling from the Bermuda Garter Belt Cardiac Shutdown phenomena... Damn near nobody left.

The Old Days by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I used to hate it when old worn-out coots used to sit in the control room and tell horse manure encased lies about something called 'the Old Navy'. Every watch, the old rascals used to talk about "Times long ago when kids of today wouldn't have lasted 20 minutes..." 'Kids of Today' was old coot code for any sonuvabitch listening below the age of 40.

Somewhere along the line, I joined the old coots. I think visions of something called 'the Old Navy' come with white hair and an AARP card... The point where studs of yesteryear become old goats. The point where you can trigger moonbeamer whines and watch people who understand fissionable doins, jump through ever diminishing firey hoops until they hop up their own stern tube.

Jeezus it's fun! Like being turned loose in a New Orleans cat house with a credit balance!

If anyone had told me at the time I would look back someday and use terms like "The best years of my life...", I would have said the sonuvabitch needed clinical help.

Time softens things like being so gahdam cold and miserable, wet and smelly, unshaven and standing on the bridge staring at endless miles of saltwater for 4 hours twice a day... Day after day.

Or painting acres of inanimate metal until you either recognized you had a blue ribbon sunburn or sniffed enough methel-ethel-keytone that you actually thought you might be a direct decendent of God or the King of France.

Or breathing totally environmentally unacceptable air... A foul, funky airborne Mulligan Stew of bilge odor, percolated sanitary tank air, cooking smells, the unmistakable aroma of three tons of fermenting dirty laundry, and 80 naughty boys who had been playing soap and water hookey for thirty days... Cigar and sea stores cigarette smoke

and God knows what else. Unlike our President, WE inhaled... Regularly... Hell, the inside of our lungs probably look like the inside of a movie theater Hoover bag. Asbestos? Crissakes, we wandered around in it. Stuff was floating around like ragweed pollen. Hell, on Requin, we poured milk on it and ate it for breakfast... Asbestos? If you served on diesel boats, when they cremate you and pull out what's left, they'll have to bust your lungs up with a sledgehammer.

Ask a moonbeam Navy man if he ever heard of 'dead air'... Air that would not support combustion... Air you could test with a Zippo lighter. If you had a good flint, fully fueled lighter and you flipped the wheel 67 times and just got sparks, 99 times out of a hundred it was dead air. You could always tell bad air time... Marlboro men went rooting through side lockers for plug tobacco.

Moonbeam boys never had magic raisin bread, either. Remember the raisin bread you could shake and all the raisins would run away?

Speaking of stuff you could eat, there was something I never figured out. Out on pier 22 there was a collection of dumpsters... Each dumpster had the intended item it received, painted on it. Oily rags, metal, egg shells, coffee grounds, and edible garbage... Edible garbage? Who ate that crap? Someone said they hauled the stuff to Quantico and fed it to the Marines... Called it Halls of Montezuma Surprise... I never believed that. I think they bagged it and hauled it over to the tin can piers.

Some beamer responded to some inane drivel I wrote with, "Man, if you ain't been on a nookie dookie 120 day run with no algebra book and Vienna symphony tapes, you don't know anything about submarines... So shut the hell up!..." Sweetheart, if you ain't never laid in an after battery rack reading skin books, scratching your athlete's foot on a bunk chain and listening to four Fairbanks rock crushers hammering out turns for home... You got paper mache dolphins, and when the prince kisses you... You're still gonna be a frog.

I love this stuff! Some things never change except when you get old, you don't throw furniture.

You know you're getting old when nobody knows what you're talking about when you say diesel submarines, or gives a good gahdam... And when you watch the Discovery Channel and they show a program about The Hunley, an old Reb handcranked one compartment submersible that set up housekeeping on the floor of Charleston harbor during the great war for southern liberation. Have you seen THAT contraption? Now, there was 'Old Navy'. You know those sonuvabitches could tell you something about 'dead air'... They probably invented the stuff.

One of the great things about growing old is you run into old dogeared raps callions like Ray Stone who wouldn't know a CO2 scrubber from an iguana prophylactic... Who never spent 120 days under anything that didn't wear lipstick and whose name was still whittled on a barstool at Bells when the wrecking ball hit the place.

Then one day, your wife comes downstairs laughing like hell with a response from some guy named Sid... A guy you never met but know instantly that you'd like to buy him a beer.

And the world's okay. Smoke boat bluejackets still live... Someone has the helm... And the first load of midrat cinnamon buns will be clearing the oven in 20 mins. Thanks Sid.

Requin Renders Honors by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I have always been skeptical of folks who begin the recounting of an event with, "Honest to God... This really happened." Having dabbled in the verbal horse pucky trade myself, I am suspicious of such a lead in. I have served with some of the most accomplished liars in the free world. All sea stories, especially submarine sea yarns, begin with, "No shit... This REALLY happened..." In the following instance, that is an accurate observation... No shit!

It was '61 or '62. We were engaged in some kind of hunt 'em, bomb 'em horsecrap somewhere out in the 'It all looks the same' Atlantic, when we get word to surface next to some giagonzo bird farm. When we hit the surface, holy jumpin' jeezuz! It looked like Chicago had broken loose and was heading to Europe at 25 or 30 knots! Damn, it was big.

The Old Man passed the word that we were abeam to port of the USS Antietam... And that shortly an Admiral's barge would be lowered (The only difference between a Captain's gig and an Admiral's barge is the horsepower of the sonuvabitch riding it). The Admiral to be arriving shortly was non other than the big sea daddy of the east coast fly boys... COMAIRLANT... Heavy cheese, industrial strength brass.

Again, the Old Man took to the 21 MC:

"I want all members of the topside gang to lay topside smartly... Wearing covers."

Covers? We didn't have white hats aboard... How are we gonna pull this gahdam rabbit out of the hat?

Then it hit us. What did they tell you all the time? Learn to improvise... Think on your feet.

Well, when we got bread in Norfolk, it was packed for commercial distribution, meaning packed for the restaurant trade. It came in a big cardboard box from the Bond Bread Company. In the end of the box were 3 dozen paper hats... White paper hats with a picture of a smiling kid and the words, "Bond Bread is Gooder!"

We issued the hats to all the lads laying topside, then me and Stuke put ours on and went hopping and popping up the after battery hatch.

Here was our logic... First, we weren't great thinkers, but we figured from the Antietam being over a mile away, all the sonuvabitches could tell was that we had something white on our heads. Even Superman couldn't have figured out we were decked out in paper greasy-spoon hats. We were brilliant... What geniuses... What ingenuity... How clever...

Suddenly, the skipper appeared and 18 men in two ranks, standing there in goofy paper hats, learned that aircraft carriers had optical stuff that would allow them to count the pubic hairs on a pigmy at over five miles. After rendering the hand salute and running our flag up and down, we were cordially invited to the crew's mess for a cup of coffee and an ass chewing.

It didn't help matters that before COMAIRLANT arrived, a recently acquired messcook shot the GDU so that the barge was greeted with a carpet of bobbing orange rinds.

Forgive me Mr. Rogers, "It wasn't a beautiful day in the neighborhood."

Roger RamJet by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I have no idea who Roger RamJet is... Only that it is damn fortunate that we rode SUBRON SIX boats at different times in the history of the petroleum force. Jeezuz, if one-tenth of the stuff in his epic piece of literary endeavor is true, it is fortunate for said Roger that 'Three Strikes, Your Out' legislation was to be enacted well after his return to civilian life. Roger was one of those "All the King's Horses and All the King's Men" (to include Johnny Cochran, F. Lee Baily and Jeezus) couldn't keep out of hot water.

This Thanksgiving, the entire world should drop to it's knees and give thanks to the Great White Buffalo or whatever Diety they believe in, that Mr. RamJet and I never pulled liberty together. I never understood the concept of 'Enough is enough' and lived in a world where it was impossible to be too outrageous, or comprehend the point where idiot behavior and the UCMJ collided. Senior RamJet seems to have engaged in similar research.

We were diesel boat sailors - a downline link in a continuous chain of seagoing knuckleheads, who rode Naval vessels the EPA, Food & Drug Administration, and Humane Society would condemn today. We invented second hand smoke... We were good at what we did, but registered heavily on the Richter scale of improper social behavior... It was our legacy.

I hope Mr. RamJet is currently under lock and key or at least chained to an 80 ft. oak tree.

The Wigwam by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In 1959, Marylanders were wading knee-deep in slot machines. If you took highway 301 north from Virginia, you hit 'Slot Machine Alley' once you crossed the Potomac. From LaPlata to a place called Waldorf, lay the neon illuminated yellow brick road of catered sin and marginal activity. In 20 to 30 miles you could lose your money, your virginity, get your car painted, your fanny tattooed, photographed with women your mother wouldn't approve of, buy every type of illegal fireworks, firearms, booze, plaster lawn ornaments, meet motorcycle bad guys, and use restrooms a self-respecting pier rat wouldn't enter.

The capital and Mecca of this vast strip of depraved living was Waldorf... And the palace of painted women with "I Love a Sailor" ankle bracelets was "The Wigwam."

Whenever anyone on the boat came down with something our corpsman had difficulty diagnosing or identifying, he would say, "I have no gahdam idea what you've picked up, bit if you got it at the Wigwam... You're gonna die."

The Wigwam's core activity was one arm bandits. When anyone in the car you were in said, "You guys want to stop at the Wigwam and grab a cold one?", a smart sailor would take out a five and stuff the rest of his money in his shoe. Money in pockets evaporated.

Two signs in the men's room: "DO NOT THROW CIGARETTES IN WASTEBASKET" and "RUBBER MACHINE MAKES CHANGE"... For some reason, I remember that.

All the gals who hung out at the Wigwam wore clamdigger pants two sizes too small, so the seat of them was like Spam in a snare drum. They also had pop up bras... You know those pointy jobs they advertised in the "True Love" magazines. These were exotic women... They would smile, wink and say, "Hey sailor, what are WE drinking?"

"Don't know about WE but I'm having a draft."

"Well, how 'bout a couple of quarters for the slots, honey?"

I always wondered how much of the Norfolk area Navy payroll never made it north of Waldorf. Some idiots actually believed that if the stars and planets were in proper alignment, a sailor could make a fortune at the Wigwam. From all my visits, I came to the conclusion that all you could do at the Wigwam was get drunk, get broke, get rolled, get pestered by painted ladies, and get back change from the rubber machine... And best of all, get rides north.

They had gas stations selling brands of gas nobody ever heard of... "Zingo Gas"... "Cargo Gas"... "Zapco"... "Whammo Supreme"... Not to mention all major oil firms, with

grades of gas whose contents were only known to God and the guy getting rich unloading the stuff.

The people of this area sat up nights thinking of new ways to separate John Q. Bluejacket from his money. It would have simplified life considerably and saved a helluva lot of time if someone had invented a machine that could have grabbed a sailor, turned him upside down and shake all the money out of his pockets.

Signs would read, "NOW APPEARING...LIVE...ON STAGE, 'BOOM BOOM LATURE'...DIRECT FROM NEW YORK...FOR A LIMITED ENGAGEMENT" Limited engagement meant until stretch marks, varicose veins and saggy boobs failed to draw sailors to the designated flypaper.

It's all gone now. Somewhere in the ensuing interval, religion took hold in the region... And the Wigwam was born again as a bakery. But somewhere, embedded in the parking lot asphalt has to be one of those "I Love a Sailor" ankle bracelets with the fake rubies.

Heavy Weather II by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

At Sub School, they explained that some enterprising gentleman had invented the vane-like strips that damn near ran the entire length of the ship below the waterline, called "rolling chocks." They prevented heavy rolls. Whoever sold that load of horse manure, could sell Wonder Bras in a convent... If the Requin was an example of how those things worked, someone should have revoked the patent.

Someone would come over the 21MC with, "Stand by for heavy rolls... Batten down all unsecured equipment, secure all gear adrift."

In E-3 talk, this translated into... All hell is about to break loose... In five minutes, the entire crew will be reeling around like a bunch of drunk lumberjacks at a log-rolling contest... Stuff you haven't seen for six months will appear from under bunks, fall out of vent lines, or slide out of cracks and secret rat holes. The after battery head would take on the distinct aroma of gastric juice mixed with partially digested chow... And grown men would start making intermittent contact with stationary objects.

Our Old Man liked to ride the trough... He must've loved the sound of busted crockery and grown men cussing... The two most prevalent sounds during heavy rolls. If you want to hear grand master level profanity, call for 'preparations for heavy rolls' when a cook has his deep fat friers' full of hot grease.

Torpedomen are slobs... I know, I was one. Anyone who wants to debate that declaration, never saw the inside of a torpedo room when they turned the white lights on for a returning to port, "turn to..." A "turn n' burn." A Greyhound bus station men's room at Thanksgiving looks better than a lived-in torpedo room.

Torpedomen should come with a federal warning riveted to their chest:

'PROSPECTIVE BRIDES SHOULD KNOW THAT THE ATTACHED SONUVABITCH IS INCAPABLE OF PICKING UP DIRTY SOCKS, STINKING T-SHIRTS, OR SOUR TOWELS AND CANNOT BE TRAINED. ON THE ONE-TO-TEN SLOB SCALE, THIS INDIVIDUAL SCORED 9.8'

We were in some kind of exercise where we shot a lot of 'pyrotechnics.' Remember, I was an after battery rat... I have absolutely no idea what the point of the exercise was. Hogan's alley left those details to the skipper and the wardroom. Our immediate concern was all the wooden boxes that the flares and star shells came in. In keeping with the "To be expected level of sensitivity, consideration, and common courtesy exhibited by torpedomen," the bastards carted their industrial waste aft and deposited it in the after battery. What delicate reasoning did they give? I've always loved this one... Get this...

"If we surface to dump one and two-way trash, the dumping party won't have to pass this stuff through the forward battery and disturb the sleeping officers."

Well, in the end we ended up with busted wooden crates, twisted metal bands, and sawdust... And thinking we were assembling for an immediate dump, the enginemen and motor macs sent their contribution forward. One little surprise package the snipes put together was a cardboard box full of oily rags, covering a burned out electric motor half the size of a tank turret.

We appealed to the diving officer to put us on the roof for a quick two-way... Or at least a one-way, surface dump. The U.S. hadn't invented the term 'human rights' at that time, so we based our plea on the Geneva Convention, the Bill of Rights, the Calcutta Health Code, the 14th. Amendment, regulations governing typhoid epidemics, and threw in a couple of Biblical references.

We hit the surface... I was the dumper... That's how you will be able to find me in the National Cemetary when I get my pine peacoat. Look for,

'DEX - - MASTER DUMPER (SS)'

I put on my master dumper badge of office... One life belt... One dog chain belt. It was too rough to pop the sail door and toss the stuff over the side, so we passed it up by human chain to the bridge where I tossed it out far enough to clear the tank tops... Clearing the tank tops is the singular requirement for Master Dumper's Mate.

Well, I was doing great until the little surprise package from the engine room arrived... The one with the oily rags covering an electric motor the size of a small bank safe. When I held it over the side to toss it, the bottom of the box opened up like the bombay doors on a B-25. The electric motor appeared, rapidly decended, and bounced off the tank tops with a very resounding CLANG, you could hear from the bridge. The skippers'

stateroom was right next to the impact point. For those of you who missed the pleasure of riding petroleum-powered submersibles, an electric motor bouncing off an empty... Make that blown main ballast tank, creates a not too pleasant sound. Crawl into a 55 gallon drum and have your next door neighbor take a whack at it with a sledgehammer... That's the sound.

We all looked at the 7MC...

"Bridge, Captain... What in the hell was that?"

"Captain, Bridge... What was what? ...Sir?"

"That gahdam racket!!"

"Didn't hear it, sir"

"Christ Mike... Sounded like we hit a floating barn."

"What side sir?"

"Right here... Starboard side... After end of the fwd. battery... In line with my stateroom."

"Can't see anything... Everything looks okay, sir."

"Very well... Keep an eye out, gentlemen..."

LT Mike Owens owned me. All he had to do was reference my stupidity and I would be the late dead master dumper. Under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, any form of electric armature sleep interruption of the skipper due to crew stupidity calls for the guilty party to be publicly beaten to death with a sock full of stale doughnuts.

Wherever LT Owens is now, he still has my "Good for one kiss on the butt" I.O.U... Small debt for having ones' life saved... And never again did I trust anything originating in the forward engine room... And just another thing on the long list of reasons I wouldn't have lasted ten seconds in Rickover's Navy.

Movies by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Smallest theater in the world... Most crowded... Most uncomfortable seating... Screen the size of the cover of LIFE magazine... World's worst audience.

Movies on submarines were links to the world of sanity and pretty ladies. If Edison hadn't invented those reels of celluloid magic, submarine crews would have chosen up sides and killed each other in the middle of the second week out.

You picked up movies at the U.S. Naval Station Motion Picture Exchange. There were 'in port' movies and sea prints. Hollywood logic said don't give the sons of Popeye anything that will keep them from spending their hard-earned wampum at the theaters... Don't give the idiots anything that will compete with stuff we are charging to see. But, since ships at sea were manned by folks who had no opportunity to shell out their bucks to catch a flick, the Hollywood folks sent a couple of prints of every first rate new release for strictly controlled viewing at sea. These films were called 'sea prints.' Sea prints were issued by WAVES, lady sailors at the main base (N.O.B., Naval Operating Base, Norfolk) and they operated out of the Motion Picture Exchange.

If you were of dubious gender, uglier than a wild boar, had heavy body hair, an attitude like a gahdam snake and the vocabulary of an Irish sewer digger, chances are you eventually wound up shuffling sea prints at the Motion Picture Exchange. They were one tough bunch of honeys.

Some officer intimated that our chances of getting a lot finer class of film entertainment would be greatly enhanced if one of our lads would volunteer stud services for the ladies. These gals were ugly! You could toss 'em into an Iraqi P.O.W. camp and the inmates would have quickly helped them back over the wire. You would have to lie to a blind man to find someone to bed down with one of these atomic darlings. They also did not appreciate terms like, 'fat ankled lesbians.'

We used to draw a bunch of sea prints every time we went out. One big, round the clock 'movie marathon' and you had seen everything, or part of everything, in five days. By the end of the third week, you were turning off the sound and assigning speaking parts to guys watching. For example, Erol Flynn in Robin Hood...

"Marion, what a cute fanny you have."

"Robin, you nasty devil, get your muddy boots out of my clean castle..."

"To hell with you sweetheart... Little John, Friar Tuck and yours truly are gonna hit Bells... Get a load on... Come back and lose lunch in King John's A/C intake..."

We rarely developed dialog above a second grade level. When you got bored with that, you could always fall back on the last resort... Show the entire film backwards. That is the absolute end of the line on the road to boredom.

When you watched a flick, you were unbelievably lucky if you found a comfortable horizontal surface upon which to park your butt. We had things called sharpshooter buckets. A sharpshooter bucket was a tapered stainless steel can designed to take nylon trash bags... We would weight those babies and shoot them out the garbage ejector. Anyway, you could take this stainless steel sharpshooter bucket, put a heavy duty clipboard on top, fold up a foul weather jacket on the clipboard, and plant your worthless fanny on top of it all. This wasn't the best seat in the house, but it came close.

Somewhere in reel two, the nerve endings in your butt died... Fanny novocaine set in... Then your legs atrophied. When the film ended and you stood up, you found that sometime in the dark, Pinocchio had swapped legs with you.

We had popcorn... You had to fight for your share at first, but after the first three bowls, gentlemanly behavior returned and you could obtain popcorn without fear of limb dismemberment or sight loss.

One gentleman returned from the Motion Picture Exchange with Hygiene for WAVES, an anatomically correct training film. "Never in the field of human endeavor have so many laughed so hard at so little..." to paraphrase Winston Churchill.

The smallest theater in North America, but the most fun. Everytime someone passing through the crew's mess walked in front of the screen, twenty idiots yelled,

"Down in front!"

"Get outta the movie..."

"Debbie Reynolds looks a helluva lot better than Ralph Bednar... No offense, Ralph..."

It went on and on... Verbal pile on. Many times a lot more interesting than a film you had seen so many times that you had memorized the names of all the electricians and make-up people.

Hollywood never made any Cold War diesel boat films. Like everyone else, they ignored our contribution. I had two daughters... To them, the Navy was Richard Whatz-hiz-name in Officer and a Gentleman and Tom Cruise in Top Gun. Why didn't they cast Wildass Willie and the 6th. Fleet Shore Patrol Posse or Riders of the Last Smoke Boats?

They missed a gold mine.

Life in a Steel Pipe by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

My daughter said, "Dad, it looks like all you did was have fun..." I guess it looks that way to folks who never did what we did for a living. Most people have no idea what life was like inside one of those steel monsters. People always ask... "When you were underwater, could you see out?" They have the idea that submarine duty is like riding a glass bottom boat in Tarpon Springs, Florida... We just enjoyed life and watched fish go scooting by.

Walt Disney caused folks to think like that. In his rendition of the Jules Verne version of submarine service, his boat had a big glass window... Folks sat in big, overstuffed red velvet chairs, smoked imported tobacco, drank sherry, and watched the crew go out

some magic hatch and play grab-ass all over the ocean floor. That boys and girls, is pure, unadulterated bullshit... Strictly 20,000 Leagues of Grade A horse manure.

You can't see out... It's hot... It stinks... You're cooped up in less moving around room than you have in your garage. You share your living space with very active, one-inch long, multi-legged wildlife and 80 two-legged critters.

Without stupid activity, life could become unacceptably boring. There were times when life was so uneventful, you could actually hear your toenails growing.

So we did nutty stuff. We spent hours thinking up stupid stuff to do. It was either that, or a trip to the loony bin. When you lived in the North Atlantic, the only circus that came to town was the one you created in your head. We had to manufacture any fun we had.

For example... Only boat sailors will think this is funny... Why? Because they did it. If any submariner tells you he never pulled this one... He's lying.

When you got some JG or fresh 'out of the cabbage patch' lieutenant standing the diving watch... You waited. You waited until he had trimmed the boat. Then by twos and threes, you made your way to the forward room... You waited some more. Then all of you moved by ones... Twos... Until all of you were in the after room. The boat would take on weird angles... The diving officer compensated... The trim manifold operator laughed as he responded to instructions...

"Pump 500 lbs. aft... No, forward... Wait... Make that after trim... Forward trim... Belay my last... Make that zero bubble! More dive on the stern planes... What the hell's going on? What's happening??? Boat's really acting weird..."

It never took long for the COB to get a handle on what was going on.

There was another outbreak of crew lunacy on Requin... Most possibly the best... At the very least, the most memorable.

If you visit the Requin in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, she's sitting out in the river in front of Three Rivers Stadium. If you go through the boat, you will find a little aluminum fish dangling over the control room chart table... Hanging down on a bead chain with the legend 'ODIN' die-stamped in the aluminum.

They've got tour guides... Non-qual wanna-be fellows who make up answers for John Q. Public to cover what they have not the slightest clue about. There are as many stories about that little fish as there are tour guides.

Here is the straight dope. I was there... I was one of the idiots involved in it and had a front row seat in the "I will shoot the next Viking" major ass chewing.

Stuart was the primary instigator... A major player and father of that aluminum fish. I am not ratting on a fellow shipmate... Far from it. At reunions, Stuart is a celebrity... He starred in a video, signs autographs and I am told, will contract to father children for anyone wishing to have a certified diesel boat maniac in their family tree. Knowing Stu, it would probably fall out of the tree and land on its head. Stuart deserves the credit line on this one.

It was winter... Up north, cold as a witches' tit... We had rigged in all the brass monkeys. Before we singled up and took in the brow, we got this film, The Vikings. Great flick. Some other boat in SUBRON SIX gave it up, as I recall, because we got orders that didn't allow time for a movie run.

We showed it the first time, the second day out... Good movie. We then saw it six or seven times in a row. Weird story... If you haven't seen it, rent the video. Kirk Douglas, Tony Curtis, Ernest Borgnine, and I think Curtis' wife at the time... Some good lookin' blonde.

The Vikings were a ratty-ass looking bunch. They did a lot of drinking... Fondled a lot of blonde, blue-eyed women and went to sea on a regular basis. It sounded familiar...

One night, someone announced that we, the crew of the Requin, had to be the spiritual descendents of the Vikings. WHAM!! In that instant, we all became Vikings. Everyone spoke in Scandinavian, Minnesotan, Inger Stevens dialect.

"Ja Sven, you see da cheef? He's da beeg fella wit da beeg moudt!"

Everybody got into it. The skipper became Ragnar... The exec, Einar... We turned our foul weather jackets inside-out so the brown, hairy looking fake fur stuff was on the outside. We made cardboard horns and stapled them to both sides of our watch caps. When we passed each other going fore and aft, we banged our chests and yelled, "O-O-O-DIN!" (Taken from what they did to greet each other in the film).

In the movie, this old crone, old wrinkled wise woman, gives Tony Curtis this fish made from a 'falling star' i.e. meteorite... It was magnetic and was considered to be major magic because it always returned to point north. With this fish always pointing north, the film had Viking ships cutting through pea soup fog and running back and forth between Norway and England like a cross-town bus. Stu went down in the pump room and built us an aluminum fish and die stamped "ODIN" on it.

He hung it from the MC box over the control room chart table... It dangled and swung back and forth. Every time some clown from the after battery would pass through the control room, he would give it a little 'start swinging' tap. This eventually drove the Chief of the Boat stark raving nuts! He would foam at the mouth... Get red... Veins would pop out of his neck... Words like, "God save us from these unruly children" and "In the Old Navy, the old man would rake your useless butts over the coals."

Why did ODIN stay where he was? Simple... The skipper liked it.

As time passed and we became more and more 'Viking', the exec put on his "Enough is enough" voice and announced over the 21MC that the crew of Requin had just gotten out of the Viking business... All stop... Don't answer anymore Viking bells... Over... El stoppo.

Ten minutes later, some idiot tapped into the 21MC and whispered,

"ODIN LIVES... O-O-O-DIN..."

The exec lit us up like a Christmas tree. From then on, we looked around for officers before giving each other the silent Odin salute.

When we came in and the exec opened his vertical uniform locker and removed his 'hit the beach' hat, it had grown a pair of cardboard horns. It had to be a miracle because the COB used everything but truth serum to get the rats to rat on whoever did it. I think the Chief finally recognized that the leadership of Requin may have pissed Odin off.

All the exec said was,

"You sonuvabitches never comprehend when the game's over and it's time to pick up your toys and put them away!"

He was a deep thinker... We had no idea what in the hell the man was trying to communicate... We knew if he was really serious, he wouldn't be standing topside talking to the OD of the USS Grampus wearing a hat with cardboard horns attached to it.

Life was uneventful so we fought boredom any way we could. Most of the time submarine sailors won.

Forty years later, a group of late middle age bastards stood in the control room and watched Stu, the originator, replace 'ODIN'... And we yelled, "O-O-O-DIN..." and banged our chests. We were young again and someone in the crew's mess yelled,

"Jeezus, the idiots are at it again!!"

Halifax, Nova Scotia by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

By far the best port and finest town I ever had the honor of visiting. It is populated by wonderful clean living citizens who welcome bluejackets and take them into their homes and into their hearts. They produce the most hospitable ladies (and damn fine cooks) who come down to submarines laying alongside, and invite lonely boat sailors to Sunday dinner. In short, someone should make a serum called "Halifax attitude" and inoculate everyone in every submarine port in the world.

In the late fifties, Halifax was a litter-free beautiful town where every morning, pretty girls and healthy looking boys with hockey sticks waited for school buses. I was from east Tennessee... I saw my first hockey stick in Halifax.

I have spent the better part of 40 years wanting to put together enough bucks to take my blue-eyed Norwegian bride to Halifax and show her God's branch office here on earth.

In World War I, convoys from North America formed up in Halifax to draw escorts for the run to Great Britain. Two ammo ships collided, setting off most of the other ships in the harbor. The town got leveled in what became known as the Halifax Disaster. Those gallant people rebuilt the town and got back in the convoy business.

Damn near 100% of the stuff sent to Murmansk and Archangel in World War II went in ships out of Halifax. No one suffered the pain of loss by torpedo that these granite-spined Canadians endured. They are very special people.

Go there... Visit the Citadel, walk their public gardens, have a drink in the Admiral Lord Nelson Hotel, and above all, do yourself a favor... Meet and come to know the people.

One funny story comes to mind. Canadian Navy stores are called 'Nafi...' Known as 'Naffy stores.' We had some kind of reciprocal NATO agreement that let us draw stores against some kind of U.S. Navy account.

Hard living and battery acid was hell on dungarees, so we got this bright idea to order a load of Canadian dungarees from the Halifax Nafi to replace the Raggedy Andy stuff we were wandering around in.

They came by waist size... No sweat. We drew two sets for each animal in the crew. The COB picked 'em up right before we singled up and issued them at sea the next day.

When we went to put them on, they had zippers on the side and enough room in the ass for a moderate size hippo. We had drawn Canadian female dungarees.

That raised the level of our female sensitivity... Up to that point in our lives we had never spent a lot of time on the finer points and techniques of how girls take a leak. Peeing became a real hoot... It wasn't uncommon to pass through the after battery head and see a fellow shipmate peeing with his pants down around his ankles.

"You're doing great Sally... Imagine, you figured it all out by yourself without a 'Rig for Pee' bill." (Each compartment had rig bills to tell you how to do stuff... Laminated instructions that Zip the trained ape could follow.)

I sure was glad to get decent dungarees before we left so I didn't have to deal with being a female every time I hit the head.

Dresses, lace panties and parking on a freckle-maker head three or four times a day, kept women off submarines more than anything else... The bra burners never broke the code on that one... That, and no place for a discreetly located Tampon machine. None of this lends itself to a screenplay so don't look for it at your local theater. If they made the film, the Chief of Naval Operations would have to set fire to a lot of movie houses.

Back to Halifax. When we came in, Mrs. Sandwell would have me over for pot roast and potatoes. Their son was riding a Canadian can in the West Indies squadron. Mrs. Sandwell was like the grandmother I never had... I think of her often. I wasn't the only one either... She had photos of American sailors on every horizontal surface in her living room... Some of them yellowed and faded from age.

They were not a wealthy family. Mr. Sandwell was a winch operator on a fishing trawler. If the Navy ever paid them for all the pot roast and potatoes they put in American sailors, they would be rich. I truly believe the Big Sea Daddy in the Sky keeps book on folks like that and when the Sandwells report in, He'll assign them to two gold bunks in the Saints compartment and give Mrs. Sandwell a silver stove so she can work her galley magic.

In life, you come across a few truly wonderful people. The Sandwells made my list.

Halifax was first rate... 4.0 in every respect.

Anyone Remember the California Bar?

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Since the individuals named in this one are (A) still alive, (B) probably own large caliber handguns, and (C) know my current address, the names will be changed... Not to protect the innocent, since innocence was never used in conjunction with the name of either party.

Spanish port... Place called "The California Bar"... Cantina downstairs... Lukewarm cerveza... Cross between beer and llama urine... Well-worn barmaids and heavy wooden tables with the names of five thousand ships and their hull numbers whittled in the tops. Ceiling fans and flower pots were suspended from the overhead. Probably a lot of you remember the place... After all, SOMEBODY had to have carved the names and numbers of every East Coast boat in those tabletops.

Upstairs, ladies in T-shirts and white cotton panties marketed true love, undying affection and intimate personal relations in increments of 30 minutes at 200 pesetas... Or, as we used to say, "200 potatoes..." A little slice of 'Mediterranean Wedding Night' with the meter running.

Boat sailors seem to gravitate to a particular establishment. No matter where you go, someone in the crew has "Been there before and knows this great place... Not that far from the Fleet Landing."

'Great Places' are great places to lose your money, drink stuff you have no idea what it was before fermentation set in and to pick up exotic forms of athlete's foot... Imported stuff... The kind that laughs at Desenex.

There is a little known fact about the Cold War diesel boat Navy... One of our humanitarian missions was to collect various strains of potent toe fungus and carry them to various remote continents to colonize and go forth among men. Athlete's foot... That equal opportunity, gender blind, non religious bias, respecter of no ideology, present that tells those you love, you brought home something that will remind them of you when you are far away answering bells on the snorkel.

Ah yes, the California Bar... Palma... On some nights, Big Mama ran a 3 girl special... This is the Iberian lust equivalent of an Eckerd Drug Store marketing ploy... Buy two, get one free.

This nameless smoke boat bluejacket off this nameless fleet boat, forks over the requisite 500 pesetas representing the compensation for what was known in SUBRON SIX parlance as the "Whitman Sampler." In other squadrons, this package deal was also known as "Trips with hips" or an "Eeny-meenie-moe."

Mr. Nameless E-3 qualified man has completed door number one and is tip-toeing down the hall, his whites, skivvy shirt and neckerchief over one arm, his shoes and socks in the other. The only uniform, if you would call it that, was skivvy shorts, dog tags and chain, and white hat perched on his head.

In the corridor, he runs into the gun boss, a two-striper who is also on a 'Trips with hips' excursion. The lieutenant is wearing dog tags, skivvies and socks... And he too, has his hat on his head sideways.

After E-3 nameless completes his mission and comes down to where his mates are tossing down a few brews, he says,

"Holy jumpin' jeezus... You'll never guess who I ran into topside!"

"Who?"

"Mr. So n' so."

"No shit!"

"Yea idiot child, no shit."

"What did 'ya do?"

"I saluted..."

"You WHAT!?"

"I saluted the sonuvabitch."

"Why in th' hell would you salute going down a whorehouse hall?"

"We were both covered... Somthin' they said at the Lakes... If you're both covered, you exchange salutes."

"Did Mr. So n' so exchange salutes?"

"No, he just walked past and said 'I see the fleet idiot is getting laid.'"

If the fleet idiot reads this and recognizes himself, he will notice how tactfully and delicately the subject was handled. No reference to name, no reference to rate, and not a damn thing mentioned about the mechanized dandruff the girls loaded you with to hitchhike back to the boat and liven up the Alley.

Eskimo Joe by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

It's hard to remember where I met Big Jack Destefanato... I think it was in Gosport. The Brit anti-nukes were demonstrating against anything arriving under nuclear propulsion (We were diesel, but obviously it didn't matter). The powers that governed naval activity figured that the pea-brained idiots who were jumping up and down, waving signs and chanting mindless slogans, would be less agitated if we anchored out and confined our activity to the bars in an ill-defined area outside the naval yard where the limey boat sailors went for warm beer and chips.

These same 'wiser heads' figured that maturity and responsible behavior came with advancement in rate and age... Probably true, considering the antics of the non-rated boys. Anyway, their solution was to have the non-rated lads back aboard by midnight. The rated personnel could stay overnight or catch a liberty launch up to 0200 at the fleet landing. They had SPs at the landing to snap up non-rated raghats wandering in at or after Cinderella hour. Lazy shore duty sonuvabitches who liked nothing better than to nail seagoing bluejackets. They wore the same uniform we did, but never learned that a sailor's first duty was to take care of his mates.

I got a late launch... It was dark and really cold... The wind cut through your peacoat like a knife... Had to keep your hands in your peacoat pockets and turn your collar up. The idiot who penned the regulation that required sailors to keep their hands out of their pockets and their collars turned down, never were sailors out in cold weather.

I found a bar... A pub on the street right outside the gate. They had a black and white TV with a soccer game on that the Brit sailors were really involved in. I didn't understand the rules, but everyone was excited Leeds was playing Birmingham. Everyone was buying me beer and calling me 'yank'. When you are from East Tennessee and related to men who wore gray on both your mother and dad's sides of the family, being called 'yank' is kinda weird.

I bought a pack of Players 'Navy Cut' cigarettes... Worst damn things anyone ever sold to a smoker. Players made Lucky Strikes and Camels seem mild... An exotic blend of Hindu crabgrass and buffalo chips.

It was a great evening. Leeds won... Bets were paid off... Songs were sung... And I headed back with two lads stationed as instructors at the Brit sub school, HMS Dolphin.

As I got near the fleet landing, a voice calls out,

"Dex... Hold up..."

I turned and there was Big Joe.

"Hey bucko, do you know what time it is?" I

looked at my watch.

"Aye, it's 2300."

"Hell no you stupid idiot, you're still on Zulu time... Didn't set your watch... Hell, it's damn near 0100. The pier's crawling with SPs... They've even got them herding drunks on the liberty boats. They'll eat your non-rated butt alive..."

"Holy jumpin' jeezus, Joe... Hell, it won't be the first time I've gotten in the gumbo..."

"Give me your peacoat... Here's mine..."

(The Navy had just started requiring petty officers to wear their crow's on their peacoat sleeves.)

I put on the peacoat and became a first class engineman... Snipe for a night... He couldn't put mine on because (A) there was nothing on the sleeve and (B) it would cover the crow. There was Big Joe, standing in sub-zero weather with my peacoat turned inside out slung over his shoulder.

"Shore duty guys ain't too gahdam bright... If you keep your mouth shut and stick with me, we can make it back okay."

We made it to the landing... Everything was going fine until some second class flycatcher's mate with a white belt, leggings, an arm band, and a three foot billy bat, asks Joe,

"Aren't you a little cold sailor?"

"Whatzit to you? My mother was an Eskimo... Love cold weather... And don't say anything about my mother or I'll have to rearrange your dental work."

Joe damn near froze on the ride back. When we got below, I said,

"Joe, I owe you one... A BIG one..."

"You don't owe me a damn thing, shipmate... It comes with dolphins... Now shut the hell up. Let's head up to the messdecks and I'll let you buy a frozen fake Eskimo a cup of whatever is passing for coffee tonight."

We worked our way forward through the snoring mob racked out in the after battery.

"You little worthless torpedo striking forward room weasel... You played 'black gang' while I pumped ice cubes through my ticker for you tonight... If I catch you knocking the boys in the enginehouse, I'm gonna grab you by both ankles and make a wish."

Joe was full of it, but he had style.

Colon, Panama... Ancon Heights... Fresh pressed whites and three pay days in our pockets. We got word that EN1(SS) Destefanato was packed in the Panamanian pokey and needed \$200 American to rejoin the free citizens of the planet. It took two hours and a small fortune in Balboas to get a cab to take us to three police stations and the jail. Paid \$200 and \$50 to make sure there was no report to Naval authorities.

It seems that Big Joe punched an undercover cop's lights out. The fellow was in the process of rounding up working girls and attempted to separate Joe and the Spanish damsel he was quite taken with.

"That girl was a proper lady..."

"Sure Joe."

"No, I mean it. Someone musta made a mistake... These damn Pomerainiums just go around roundin' up women... Rotten bastards..."

"Sure Joe, anything you say... By the way Joe, tonight three worthless forward room sailors blew a big chunk of their liberty funds to bail your good for nothing butt out of the Panamanian pig pen. We are now going to pool the rest of what we've got left, buy some barbecued monkey strips, a six of cerveza, and make it back to the boat. Make

that two sixers... Gives us three each... Lay off the deck force... No more riding the sorry-assed paint spreaders or next time we'll leave you in there counting cockroaches. Oh, and one more thing... Ever since you made me an honorary snipe, my I.Q. has dropped fifty points and I've been doing stupid stuff like ransoming ugly enginemen... Joe, that peacoat in England had to be the best investment you ever made."

"Did you guys really shell out \$250?"

"Don't worry about it."

"Hey, I'll pay you guys back."

"Anyone ask you to pay anyone back? Forget it... No one said a damn thing about money. All they said was 'Let's go find the big idiot and spring his worthless butt.' Let's get off this 'I love you darling' bullcrap and go play sailor."

And we did. Big Joe the Eskimo... He's no longer with us. When he turned in his gear, we lost a good man. He taught us the true meaning of shipmate and what our dolphins required of us. One night, I came off liberty to find him standing a 12 to 4 watch topside.

"Eskimo man, what in the hell are you doing standing a damn topside watch?"

"That new kid Eddie... His mom came down... Didn't know the kid had the duty... Wanted to take him to dinner and have him for the weekend."

"You want me to see the duty officer and relieve you?"

"Hell no... The kid is getting his first lesson in being a shipmate."

That was Big Joe. .

Mornings Alongside by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The day officially began with the arrival of the Krispy Kreme donut truck. When the donuts were aboard and signed for, the topside watch would holler down the conn hatch to the below decks watch...

"Wake up the little darlings and tell the sonuvabitches that daddy has the donuts..."

Five minutes later, some half awake idiot non-rated non-qual would wander up, wiping the sleep out of his eyes, yawning and mumbling something about the only people being up at this time of morning were burglars and bad women...

"Where are the donuts?"

The donuts were inside the sail door... They were ALWAYS inside the sail door. Going back to the days of Ahab and the White Whale, the sonuvabitches were put just inside the sail... The fastest new guy giveaway was 'Where are the donuts?'

The next comment was...

"Hey horsefly, where's my coffee? Didn't anyone tell you that when you come up to get the donuts, you always bring the topside watch a cup of that 'last of the all-night pot' coffee? That stuff well on its way to making the metamorphic transition to asphalt?"

"How do you take your coffee?"

"Black... Straight black... I like that high test, full throttle, caffeine-loaded stuff that will pop rivet your eyelids to your skull... 'Nother thing hoss... After you dump first chow garbage on the pier, you collect all the coffee cups in the watch shack and haul them below. Oh, and by the way, did the Chief issue you a qual card?"

"Yes SIR!"

"I'm not a gahdam 'sir' you idiot! Anything that has a butt that fits the head in the forward room is a 'sir.' I'm 'hey Dex' or 'Alley rat', got it?"

"Yes si.... I mean... Right, Dex..."

Next, the duty officer came up... Watched for the prep flag on the Orion. He signaled the topside watch to break the colors when they dropped the prep flag. Then, the officer crossed over to the pier to pick up his morning newspaper.

No officer in the boat could visit the head without reading material. Digestive elimination and printed material get cross-connected at Annapolis. The eye lens-fanny valve commissioned interconnect... What we just lumped under the general heading of officer stuff.

Then there was morning quarters... Never fully understood morning quarters. A group of grown men standing aft of the sail listening to a description of what fun stuff the Chief had in mind to fill your day... It was always the same junk you did every other day... Chip, paint and shine inanimate objects.

Morning quarters afforded one the opportunity to survey your fellow inmates of your submersible asylum. Unless you were on the verge of complete sight loss, it became apparent that you were just another ugly face in a collection of ugly folks (granted, some WAY more ugly than others)... Like roll call in the monkey house at the zoo.

"Answer up when your name is called... Vanderheiden... .. VAN - DER - HEI - DEN...Fer crissakes Dutch, I saw you here... SPEAK UP!! Or do I have to send you an engraved invitation?"

"Yo..."

"Stuke!"

"Yo..."

"Stuke... Understand you idiots can't find the T-wrench to the after capstan... Take the forward capstan wrench up to the tender and get the boys in the metal shop to fabricate two more... Got it?"

"Aye, Chief."

"You know how the folks that run Texaco stations attach ball bats to the men's room key so no one will drive off with it? Well, have 'em chain a head seat to it that you guys can wear around your neck to stop you from losing the damn things..."

"Um, Chief..."

"Yeah, Stuke?"

"You keep looking all over for your pipe all the time. You want us to have a doubler plate chained to it for you?"

"Wiseass."

"Armstrong!"

"Yo..."

"Armstrong, go pick up the guard mail. Try not to steal any white hats in the radio shack. Some day, even idiots wake up... Those guys are going to eat your lunch and I'm gonna love it..."

"Thanks Chief... Is this a marriage proposal?"

"You two bastards... How in the hell did you qualify in submarines? How did I wind up on the same boat with you two idiots? God must hate me..."

"We love you, Chief..."

And so it went. Early morning with the 'Fleet Elite.'

Machete Juice by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Man has done wondrous things with the art of fermentation. History is replete with

examples of fine and delicate spirits brought to us through masterful experimentation with fermentation and distillation. As an East Tennessean, I am proud to be associated with the fine products developed and made available worldwide by Mr. Daniels.

At the other end of the spectrum, man has found a way to harness the full destructive power of sugar cane... Bottle the stuff and market it to the idiots of the planet. 151 proof rum is a perfect example of just such an invention. The sonuvabitch who created 151 rum, took something innocent like molasses... Briar Rabbit syrup and did something to it that turned it into moon rocket fuel. Selling 151 proof rum to submarine sailors ranks up there with passing out fragmentation grenades to kindergarten kids.

I'd never heard of the stuff. Most of the lads in the after battery on Requin were beer drinkers. In port, the lads regularly flushed their kidneys with a variety of draft brewed products that over an extended and most enjoyable period of time, reduced you to a level of stupidity that allowed you to still operate thirteen button blues and remember a large part of the elements of verbal communication. The descent into silly behavior was gradual... Took the better part of an evening interspersed with convivial trips to the head.

While we were out in our saltwater world gainfully employed poking invisible holes in the ocean, men in the land of warm sun and palm trees were cooking off stuff with the lethal qualities of contraband ordinance. The employees of something called the "Three Dagers Company" were producing and bottling a liquid product that could reduce otherwise responsible adults to blithering idiots in less time that it took them to order a third round.

Any sailor who got introduced to 151 proof rum will tell you that it was the same as wrapping your lips around the muzzle of a 16 inch gun on the forward high turret of the main battery, USS Iowa... And jerking the lanyard. One minute, you were a productive member of the human race and the next minute, you were directing traffic in downtown Kingston in a straw hat, sandals and skivvy shorts.

I am sure there are members of the smoke boat establishment out there who mastered the art of 151 proof rum consumption... But I will tell you, none of you rode the Requin in the early 60s.

One of the amazing properties of 151 proof rum is that it can reduce your I.Q. to zero point zip but leave you convinced that you could win the bull-riding event at a championship rodeo. Every bottle sold should come with an insanity defense chit.

There is no energy crisis... We could tell all the OPEC oil ministers to go molest their camels. 151 proof rum is highly combustible... You top off a Tench boat with Three Dagers Golden Supreme and you can overhaul *Miss Budweiser* in a state five sea.

In 1962, we pulled into Charleston. I had gotten five fifths of 151 rum as my allotted gallon of duty-free booze. My intent was to return home and give some old high school buddies the opportunity to destroy themselves.

I had family in Beaufort, South Carolina... An aunt and an uncle who was a recently retired army colonel. I was invited to visit. I took two bottles as a gift figuring it would be a novelty and a great conversation piece. After dinner, my aunt, a reserved southern lady, left the table and went to the kitchen to build herself a rum and coke. I followed her.

"You don't want to fool with that stuff... It packs one helluva wallop!"

"Oh, Dex... I was drinking rum before you were born."

"Not that stuff... It's lethal. Just use a little."

"Dex, I went through Prohibition... You name it, we drank it. Don't worry about your dear old aunt..."

During the next hour, I got to witness a dear old aunt pass out on a porch swing and a former army colonel fall out of a hammock.

The next morning, my uncle appeared... Standing there in his robe, his silver hair looking like he used an eggbeater for a comb... He put on his reading glasses, picked up the bottle and said,

"Jeezus, this stuff is three quarters alcohol!"

God never made an O-6 officer that ever listened to a jaybird kid he'd seen running around in diapers.

"Yes sir... Damn stuff is wicked... Seen members of our forces afloat do some amazing things after getting wrapped around a few drinks."

"I'll bet you have, son."

"Yes sir..."

"If you ever fool with this dynamite, do me a favor... Throw your car keys up on the roof."

It was all part of being in the diesel boat navy. If it was out there, we got next to it. As Cowboy would put it,

"There never was a horse that couldn't be rode... And never was a cowboy what couldn't be throwed."

I never saw any sonuvabitch in SUBRON SIX get up in the stirrups of the 151 pony and go the distance. I saw several that had to be extracted from extremely high vegetation and one lad returned to the quarterdeck with a police car hood ornament hanging out of his jumper pocket.

It was all long ago... In the days where society forgave the antics of young men who did rough work on their behalf and good officers understood that you couldn't burn down civilization on E-3 pay no matter how stupid you were or how hard you tried. At times, silver dolphins were your best insanity defense.

Author's note - How come Three Daggers Rum... 151 rum... Had "FOR NORTHWEST TRADE ONLY" overprinted in big red letters on the label? Northwest where? Canada? Washington and Oregon? Obviously in Northwest somewhere, idiots were customers for this high octane rot gut.

Author's note #2 - In the nuclear navy, the force commander sensibly requires a full background check and ten day waiting period for all rum purchases.

The World Below the Walking Deck

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

If you never were a deck ape on a smoke boat, you may want to skip this one. There was a world between the walking deck and the pressure hull. It was my world. It is where we did business in port. A hot as hell place in summer... Cold as a witches tit in winter... Where little sunlight penetrated and where rust could get ahead of you if you weren't a heads up bunch.

When an old deck ape visits one of the memorial boats maintained by cities for the tourist trade, he always looks at how they care for his world before he gives them the seal of approval. Damn near all get a lousy score. They paint and maintain what you can see. To them, what the public can't see, doesn't exist. In truth, such neglect will feed an oxidation cancer that will eventually eat from the inside what the poor idiots are slapping paint on, on the outside... Cosmetics on a terminally ill patient.

My love, the USS Requin (SS-481) sits in Pittsburgh looking like a million bucks externally but little telltale giveaways show those of us who lived in the world below the walking deck she's in bad shape and the folks who maintain her are in for one big, expensive surprise... The price rust extracts from those who fail to recognize the destructive potential. I am sure that the non qualified folks who operate the money mill have noticed rust holes in both sides of bow buoyancy tank... The rust eaten edges of the limber holes... And the ½ inch of rust flakes covering the exposed upper pressure hull. When holes like these start to appear, the gauge of the skin that's left is tissue paper thin. God never made a self-healing submarine. The folks in Pittsburgh are just about to learn a lesson that will at the very least have them digging deep in their money

belt or at worst, start looking for ways to rid themselves of the visual evidence of their neglect.

We lived in what is known as 'the crawlspace'. We scraped, chipped, painted, and lubed everything down there. You had to be half human, half snake to get around in that void. We stored our gear in what used to be the ready ammo lockers, back when the boats carried deck guns. First, you checked the 'zinc's.' Zinc is a soft metal and the Navy used bars of the stuff as a sacrificial diode... Metal to be eaten to keep electrolysis from making a meal out of the boat. As we inspected them, we made a list of those eaten away to the point they needed to be replaced.

We also inspected the NLMs, noise level monitors... the little transducers along the hull that allowed us to listen to ourselves when submerged.

We inventoried all the gear in the pressure lockers. Once we determined the lockers contained the specified gear, we restowed them in such a way that it wouldn't bang around and give away our position when we were running submerged.

We had line lockers where we stowed our mooring lines ('heavies' a.k.a. heaving lines, were kept in the forward room). Line lockers were a pain in the hip pockets. When you hit heavy weather, you always lost line locker lids. The gods of the sea must've eaten line locker lids as a dietary staple. We spent a good portion of our naval careers replacing gahdam line locker lids. I once asked the COB,

"Chief, how come the sonuvabitches who built these damn things didn't make metal locker lids and use full piano hinges... It's always the damn hinges that give out?"

"Bucko, we sunk damn near the entire Jap navy with these boats... We did it without the advice of gahdam worthless E-3 deck apes redesigning the sonuvabitches. Just replace the damn things and get the hell out of the 'what if' business... Turn and burn."

If submarine CPOs ran the world, we'd still be riding mules and using outhouses.

If you worked your way forward past the forward escape trunk, the bull gears for the bow planes, the anchor chain locker, and the impulse air flasks, there was a small hidden pocket of space known to those of us in the Requin deck force as the 'siesta nest.' Between the impulse air flasks and the after bulkhead of bow buoyancy, was our hideout. We kept it packed with Playboy magazines... Sports Digest... Car & Driver and old, raggedy Popular Mechanics.

Up that far forward, the guys who designed Requin put two rows of limber holes. If you had a light breeze, the air circulation was great.

I have always understood what homeless people live like... Our hideout was exactly like a place where derelicts, bums and hobos would call home. For us, it was the place we goofed off... Solved all the world's problems... Cussed naval leadership, the nuclear

navy, the Orion quarterdeck, shore duty guys... The entire Marine Corps... Norfolk cab drivers... Hampton Blvd. cops... Shore patrol... All the people of France... Various ball clubs and used car dealers. We pondered weighty questions like,

"Who in the hell ate the stuff out of the dumpster on the pier that was marked 'EDIBLE GARBAGE'?"

This was also the place where we banged on the hull, impulse air flasks and the bulkhead of bow buoyancy so folks below would think we were engaged in productive work.

The siesta nest was the only place on the boat where E-3s could get the hell away from being pinged on by qualified men. It was our clubhouse.

If you missed being a deck ape on a smoke boat, you missed one of the big hoots in life.

Thank Heaven for Naughty Girls by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

It was rough, if not damn near impossible to maintain a long distance romance with your high school squeeze when you were serving the Goddess of the Main Induction.

Why? Well first, any kid back home flippin' burgers for minimum wage looked like Daddy Warbucks compared to a smoke boat alley rat... And he sure as hell was more available. By the time I got Dolphins, thus being returned to the life of freeborn citizen of the land, the young ladies back home were well established in college. The last thing a sophisticated, young college co-ed needed was for Popeye the Bluejacket to show up on her doorstep with a sack of dirty laundry and a plan to remove her Playtex Living Girdle.

Somewhere in the legendary third week, love turned to lust and you started having rapid-fire fantasies... Most of which involved activity in the back seat of a '53 Chevy somewhere in the woods known only to you and Daniel Boone. We're not talking Cinderella-Prince Charming type romance... The prince had all the time in the world, a big castle and no problem with money. We were at best, working on a 72-hour pass, sleeping in our car and doing our damndest to stretch a twenty.

At some point, one of your shipmates introduced you to the world of commercial romance. This whole new concept allowed you to budget for the relationship and have all the rest of the day to catch up on anything you had to do. This is not the sort of thing romantic novels were based on... Didn't involve poetry composition or Montovani music, but a 72-hour liberty was enough to cover multiple visits.

The one thing you could never count on from any of these professional ladies was mail. Hookers just don't send you letters... The best you could hope for was change for a

fifty. Or if they found your neckerchief hanging on a ceiling fan blade, they might hang on to it until your boat got back from punching holes in the ocean.

I had a girl who wrote letters. There is a special place in heaven for girls who took the time to write submarine sailors (Girls who sent PERFUMED letters get a room with a view and breakfast in bed).

The lady will remain nameless since she has now been married for over 30 years, raised a couple of fine young men, has a lovely home in North Carolina, and couldn't give less of a damn about an old after battery rat in need of packing and several sets of O-rings.

At sea, I used to write to her. I would sneak a little personal time, engage my romantic coupling and turn out what had to rank with the all-time, most romantic letters ever written by a hotsacking E-3.

Mr. Nautical Subsurface Sailor... Sir Alley Rat du la Wirebrush would write epic "To Be Continued" journals of day-to-day life in the thrilling unseen craft that plowed below the Seven Seas, holding back the Red scourge that was bent on the destruction of the entire free world. Sometimes I would engage a little literary license and pad the importance of my role in the saving of mankind, decency and the American way of life. You see, very few red-blooded American girls with a V-8 set of fully functional hormones would understand the global defense implications of wire brushing verdigris off the urinal flush valves, not to mention the mission critical disposal of one and two-way trash.

I would write about what was happening, while it was happening... Sort of a diesel boat "You Were There" epic. Sometimes these diaries would reach 30 or 40 pages... You couldn't mail the damn things so why not bolt 'em together back-to-back and daisy-chain the sonuvabitches into a monster sea story... A profession of undying love and lustful affection... Taking essentially nothing and forging it into major bullshit.

I kept it tucked under the corner of the flashpad, of whatever rack I happened to be bunking in. Then I'd go on watch, only to return later to continue my literary masterpiece.

"Darling, we've been down for ten days. We are engaged in an exercise where we are a target for naval aircraft. They fly over and drop little explosive devices that go off with a loud noise... This allows us to measure the proximity and determine how accurate their attack run was. Here they come again... BLAM, BLAM!... BLAM!... BLAM, BLAM, BLAM!! It will be a few minutes until the next run..."

And so it went... Horsemanure laminated on top of horsemanure.

One night, I came off watch, pulled off my foul weather jacket, lit up a smoke and was starting to pull my rubber boots off when I heard this hilarious uproar coming from the messdecks. Guys are laughing their asses off! It sounded like while I was on watch, Bob

Hope must have crawled out of the GDU. Every two seconds, another roar of laughter... Jeezus, something must be funny... Can't wait to get these boots off and catch whatever is going on that was so gahdam funny.

I step through the watertight door by the galley when I see EM1 John Class standing on a spud locker bench reading my letter to the assembled mob of unworthy, lowlife sonuvabitches, collected there to ridicule true love in its purest form.

I did my damndest to get to John. One of the most fortunate things that ever happened to me is that I never got close enough to grab John Class. He was a light heavyweight all-navy champion boxer. In short, the gentleman would probably have punched my nasal passages into my rectum.

"Oh princess, I love you... Here they come again... BLAM, BLAM, BLAM! (Big roar) Don't forget what you promised... BLAM, BLAM, BLAM! You didn't say anything to your mother, did you? (Another big laugh.)"

John stops, turns to the crew and says,

"This should be a movie... Dex Goes to Sea..."

They didn't make 'em any finer than John Class... But at that particular moment, I would have "O-Jayed" the sonuvabitch with a smile.

Writing words on paper has gotten me in more deep doo-doo over the years than I could snorkel through....

Swinging from Limb to Limb by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

It's 0745 Monday morning and lads in foul weather jackets and worse for wear white hats are hollering stupid comments back and forth between boats as they take in lines.

"Hey, somebody take a ball bat and hold reville on the Runner's line handlers... Tell 'em the big boys are going out to play in the ocean."

"Hey Requin, just send some sonuvabitch over here with a ball bat and we'll send you back the poster boy for National Orthopedic Surgery month."

"Quit running your mouth and pull #3 off your cleat so we can haul the gahdam thing in."

"Jeezus H. Christ, am I the only 4.0 bluejacket in a world full of clowns?"

And so it went... All infused with the belching and growling of Fairbanks Morse and Jimmy 1600 hp rock crushers lighting off and blanketing the nest, half the pier and the

poor idiots standing the Orion's quarterdeck watch (in fresh whites) in black smoke. Loved it... Hot coffee, a Camel coffin nail and fresh diesel smoke... It never got any better than that.

At some point following 0800, you heard the first three blasts of the 'backing down' signal as the first boat got underway and slid stern first out into the Elizabeth River channel.

"Hey, donkey dick..."

"Yeo..."

"You guys stayin' in?"

"Yeah, watcha need?"

"My gahdam laundry... Tell Hop Sing I'll make it good when we get in... Could you pick it up and carry it up to Bells? Tell Thelma to stick it behind the bar."

"Will do."

"Much obliged... Now, if it's not too damn much trouble could you loafing sonuvabitches help us take in the brow so some hard working sailors can go protect America's women and children?"

"Dex..."

"Yeo..."

"Blow it out yer ass!"

"Nice talk sweetheart... Nice talk..."

More smoke... More backing down blasts... And Submarine Squadron Six went to work.

We didn't ride stuff that stayed down a complete college semester... They didn't operate at depths where you had to worry about running into the Titanic... And we wouldn't have recognized anything called a 'poopy suit' if it hopped up and bit us on the butt... But we were part of the submersible navy family tree. We may have been the hairy things that swing from limb to limb in that tree, but we were there.

I loved it... I never knew how much until I donated my issue to the lucky bag... Kissed my old faithful foul weather jacket goodbye... Climbed topside... Shook hands with the finest men I've ever known... And leaped into the briar patch of life.

I hear guys whine about their tour of military service.

"I was in the 346 mechanized, vulcanized and simonized pogostick infantry... In Bubblegum, Korea... Man, was that ever a jacked-up outfit... Hated every minute of it. Were you ever in?"

"Yeh..."

"What were you with?"

"Smoke boat service... SS-481... She was old, stunk and fell apart... Only had four leaks, though... Air, oil, water, and security... Loved every minute of it..."

That's a lie... Wasn't too crazy about the real cold wet parts... The times when you could pee in your heavy weather pants and an icicle would fall in your sock. The rain hit you in the face like it was shot out of a nail gun... Could've done without that shit. But all in all, the old smoke boat navy wasn't a bad place to be. In fact, it was a damn fine place to be.

There was a vast generational gap between our lads and the men that followed. I went to a Sub Vets, Inc. meeting once. Some fellow off some boat named for some state (Years ago, back in the Neanderthal '50s, the Navy provided each enlisted man a bible called the 'Bluejacket's Manual.' The BJM... After Moses crawled up Mt. Sinai and received the Ten Commandments... John Paul Jones followed him and picked up the first edition of the BJM. At Great Lakes we all learned that all you needed to survive in life was a Zippo lighter, a shot glass, a Bible, and the BJM. The BJM specifically states that battleships are named for states... Submarines are named for fish or 'Denizens of the Deep'... We used to say that only Rickover and six other guys locked in a mental ward thought George Washington was a fish...)

Where was I? Oh, yes... This modern day subsurface warrior was telling not yet fully matured sea stories...

"We were off the coast of Foosoe-Marango when Ivan pulled a perpendicular wiggle-waggle... We caught it on our super attenuated diafractic hydrogilator... You know, our SB 950-A... The Old Man ordered an over and under flim-flam with a reverse hyperjack in alpha drive... And ordered us to fifteen hundred feet..."

Fifteen hundred feet!! First thing out of his mouth I understood! You could hear diesel boat sailor's fanny vents pucker all over the room.

Fifteen hundred feet... At fifteen hundred feet, the entire crew of the boat I rode would have been heading for the Devil's tea party wearing their new pressure hull peacoats.

We were men with a joint heritage separated by terminology, means of propulsion, operating depth, living conditions, love of boat and attitude. We were fatherless bastards and the stepchildren of the fleet... You got Hyman the Big Daddy of the Nuclear Navy... We clearly got the best of that deal.

Thanks to Ray Stone I get to crowbar a lot of crap that has been stuck in my craw for years. It's really funny... Whoever thought an old chief and an old alley rat could team up and have so gahdam much fun pissing on the petunias? At first, we thought the discerning members of the nuke force would be wily old sharks... So we crafted delicate flies... Floated them out there and "WHAMMO!"... Nukes were hittin' em two at a time.

After six months of extended research we have come to the conclusion that the nuke navy will hit anything. We caught the limit the other day on a lure made out of a second-hand Tampon and two paper clips.

In the words of an old diesel boat philosopher...

"You show up at the O.K. Corral with a peashooter, you gonna be one dead sumbitch!"

Hemming, you have me worried. Did you actually see a gal so ugly she "Couldn't give it away to a messcook?" This is scary, when you consider that when we showed *The Creature From the Black Lagoon*, 'Fly' Brennan wanted to know if the creature had an unmarried sister... And it was rumored that the topside watch once found a bra marked 'PROPERTY OF LEPER RESEARCH PROJECT' in Requin's conning tower fairwater. Was she actually so ugly a diesel boat messcook would turn her down... Or are you making that up?

Engraved Dolphins by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In 1993, my wife and I visited the SubBase, New London... Make that Groton. While there, we were introduced to a lad... Fine young qualified man. He had heard that I was an old fossil left over from the diesel boat days. After he introduced himself, he unpinned his dolphins and handed them to me. I turned them over and on the backside it read

USS SO-IN-SO (SS-???) APRIL 1952 USS SO-IN-SO (SSN-???) AUGUST 1991

Father and son Dolphins. Can you imagine what it would mean to have your skipper pin Dolphins on you that your old man earned? That would be one explosive moment... A lifetime-keeper memory.

Over the years, I have seen several sets of 'engraved Dolphins'... I have always envied men who were so loved and respected by the lads they served with or would be loved by a woman so much that they would be given a set of Dolphins with an engraved sentiment on the back.

In the late '80s, I lost a very close shipmate. He got out when I did but never felt comfortable so after five or six years, he went back... Signed up... Eventually made Master Chief... Served a couple of tours in Viet-Nam as a U.S. Naval advisor assigned to

a South Vietnamese river patrol gunboat. Hell of a man... Great submarine sailor. He died on active duty and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

It wasn't until that kid at the SubBase handed me that set of engraved Dolphins that the full significance registered. What I would have given to have purchased a set of sterling... Solid sterling Balfours (the Sub Museum sells solid Balfour enlisted Dolphins)... Purchased a set and had some jeweler engrave, 'SAVE ME A RACK IN THE ALLEY - DEX' on the back and give them to the undertaker to pin on his blues. Little thing no one would have known or given a damn about, but I would have known... And if what they say is true, he would have known.

How close were we? We enlisted together. His father swore us both in... His dad was the toughest four-striper that ever lived... And our serial numbers were consecutive... His ended in 51... Mine in 52. He always maintained he was senior to me because his old man swore him in first... When in fact, he was senior to me because he was simply the better man.

Engraved Dolphins... If the 'After Battery Rat' could leave something positive with you, it would be to foster and encourage more extensive use of the practice of presenting engraved Dolphins. I really envied guys who got them... I guess they did something very right.

Just think, what if , in your old cuff link box, there was an old tarnished set of Dolphins with 'THELMA' her bra size and 'JULY 1959' on the back. That would be submarine history!

Been Saved, HALLELUJAH, Been Saved

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There was a story many years ago. A buyer for a major cigarette distributor was in North Carolina buying several box car loads of Raleighs. The fellow representing Raleighs shook the buyer's hand and said,

"You won't be sorry... Our formula now calls for 5% tobacco mixed with 95% horseshit."

The buyer looked surprised...

"Heck, give me six more box car loads... I never knew there was any tobacco in the damn things."

That is just about where these sea stories are... We're at 5% and holding. The truth has been diluted to the point that it is no longer visible without the use of long range optics. My wife now sleeps with a double barrel shotgun and garlic around her neck... Knowing that the ghost of Hyman Rickover may return and eat her husband's heart out any day now. She has not been herself since she returned one evening late and found the entire

blue crew of a boomer doing a voodoo dance on our lawn... Handling snakes, speaking in tongues, burning incense and throwing chicken bones in the air.

We were never worried until Patty Wayne let some nuclear secrets out of the bag. Diesel boat sailors were taught that the magic words of the nuke navy were "Sadda-ga-doola, micha-ga-boola, bibbity-boppity-boo, Tippacano and Tyler too..." We never knew it was "Yadda-yadda-yadda..." But the scariest part was the revelation that Hyman himself was none other than the Anti-Christ.

"Holy catfish, Andy... Do dis mean dat lil' beady-eyed... unhappy looking... self-inflating ferret... who, if boiled for half a day, wouldn't make a good bowl of soup for a sick man... That little man who viewed the world through lenses as thick as the bottom of a grape soda bottle... Do dis mean he in de league wid de debbil?"

"Or do dis mean dat lil' miserable sonuvabitch ++ IS ++ de debbil?"

"All dis gotta be 'splained to us dumb bastards ob de fossil fuel fleet... Us reprehensible, no 'count, wuffless folk dat done been classified as a carbuncle on de hind end ob de Goddess of Deep Submergence. Reverend Patty 'Bubba Boudreaux' Wayne ob de 'Church of What's Happenin' Now', done done us all a great service by enlightening us to the true nature ob de 'Big Daddy of the Atomic Monster'. From now on, we gonna bolt de do'e at de Smoke Boat Chapter ob de Mystic Knights of the Sea lodge hall..."

"Check de flypaper mama, I think we caught another one..."

"Wat'z the limit, Andy?"

"Dunno, but I does know, tain't proper to haul in more dan you kin cook 'n eat."

Okay Stone, we're gonna have to start takin' em off the hook and throwing them back...

Control Room by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The control room was the compartment where you could go to get the straight dope... Make that, as much straight dope as the United States Navy thought an E-3 should be trusted with.

I had joined the Navy voluntarily... No one hypnotized me, tossed me in a gunny sack and hauled me off to Great Lakes. Nope, did it to myself... Listened to a Navy recruiter named Malleck... Old first class gunners' mate who had sailed with Noah... The slick talking, silver-tongued sonuvabitch had pictures of Hong Kong... Tahiti... Beaches in the Med... Hula girls... Palm trees... Faraway places with smiling bluejackets and good looking women, all over the walls of his office. It seems odd, looking back... He didn't have any photos of midnight loading parties... Of sailors freezing their doodads off in

the North Atlantic. No pictures of barmaids with tattooed tits and a glass eye... No guys with chipping hammers and paint scrapers. Malleck just had pictures of places we never went and sweet young things we never saw.

Hell, I couldn't get in fast enough!

The way he explained it to me... It would be Great Lakes, then the beach in Tahiti, where as he put it,

"The only way you can keep the wimmin' off ya, is to turn queer."

He never once alluded to the remote possibility that I might see Iceland, Greenland, Newfoundland, and a helluva lot of floating ice... And hula girls only on maneuvering room calendars.

I joined. I let them pinch me, poke me, stick needles in me, remove vials of blood, and peek into crevasses, cavities, and orifices I had never seen inside, myself.

I let them yell at me... Say terrible things about my ancestors, living relatives, religion, hometown, intelligence and personal appearance, state, mother, and way of life.

I had gone to New London where medics played games no longer associated with civilized behavior... And I learned more about the mechanical care and operation of stuff that I ever had any remote desire to know. I got an academic diploma... My knowledge of things mechanical did not extend far beyond ignition keys, can openers and light switches. Somebody on Ron's BBS said,

"I didn't think sub school was that hard..."

I figure anyone who said that could make you an operating grandfather clock if you handed him a jackknife and a telephone pole.

The Navy sent some guy from the FBI to talk to my neighbors, teachers and the minister of a church I hadn't seen the inside of in 15 years.

After all this, the United States Navy didn't trust me enough to tell me where we were going half the time. I certainly wasn't going to tell the Russians... First, I didn't have a Dick Tracy pressure hull-penetrating wrist radio... And being from East Tennessee, a not too popular Communist influence hangout, I wouldn't have recognized a Red if he hopped out of the vent lines with a picture of Lenin tattooed on his cheek.

Speaking of Communists, when some Russian trawler would show up... Everyone figured it was looking for us. They could be hauling in fish by the ton and the exec would say,

"It's all for cover... The bastards are spooks looking for us... Spyships... Dex, you want to take a look? Check out all that electronic equipment on the bridge."

I looked through the scope and all I saw were old porked up, doofus-looking Russian women wearing leather aprons and black head scarves... Hanging over the rust-stained fantail, smoking brown cigarettes and scratching themselves in weird places. If they were spies, they sure had great disguises. Mrs. Portachenko and the Dig and Scratch Sweethearts didn't look like they could find their asses with a roadmap. My failure to recognize the Communist threat was one of the reasons I was never selected to be CNO.

The control room was supposed to be where you could go to validate or discredit rumors... Where you could go look at charts... Listen to officers discuss things like OP order specifics... FINEX times... And ETAs. The conning tower was the Sacred Tabernacle of the Skipper (God's direct representative in the North Atlantic).

The control room was like the central outdoor market in downtown Baghdad. Wise traders came to traffic in lies, cleverly packaged bullshit, the latest rumors, gossip, grapevine produce, and high-grade horseshit.

Truth never made an appearance... Maybe it did, can't say for sure... But if it did, it didn't stay long enough for us to recognize it.

There was always some old "I've been everywhere and seen everything" cigar chewing Chief camped out on the hydraulic manifold. The hydraulic manifold was the place all submarine qualified Chiefs went before they retired or died. One of my biggest fears was that when I got to Hell it would be full of Chief Petty Officers and hydraulic manifolds. Then somebody came up with something even scarier... Someone said that when I died, the Devil was gonna make me hot rack with Rickover... I've sinned, but nowhere near the point where they make you hot sack with THAT beady-eyed ferret! If I had known that was even a possibility, I would have taken Billy Graham pills and renounced my association with Ray Stone.

All Chiefs lie... Lying, beer drinking and blue streak cussing are the only practical factors once you transcend above the rag hat.

Chief Petty Officers owned the control room. They ruled it from their padded locker perch by the hydraulic manifold. You had to be a major league, pathological liar beyond salvage or redemption to survive in the control room.

No matter how wild the lie... How fantastic and unbelievable... No matter how fully horsecrap-loaded the plot vehicle was, it never failed... Some old barnacle butt, smoke boat Chief would open with,

"Hell, that ain't nothin'... Back in '42..."

The words 'that ain't nothin' have preceded some of the gahdamedest self-manufactured bull dookey ever dumped on mankind. Submarine Chiefs in my day, made Bill Clinton's lying amateur-level stuff. If lying ever becomes an olympic event, the old E-9s will collect gold medals like dogs collect fleas.

The control room was where it all happened... It was where the wardroom mingled with the 'Great Unwashed' and all the big doins' were hashed out. It was the crossroads... The tracks. The alley housed the riff raff... The hobo community... Bums and assorted trash... We loved it. The jungle below the sea.

Most meaningful memories of submarine duty center around the messdecks or the control room.

"Blow negative to the mark!"

"To the mark, aye!"

"Negative blown to the mark!"

"Chief, cycle the vents..."

(Pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop)

"Vents cycled and shut!"

"Very well, make your depth 200, three down..."

"Two hundred... Three degrees down bubble!"

"Chief, what does it take for a sonuvabitch to get a dry jacket and a hot cup of something resembling coffee?"

"Ask politely."

"You want polite conversation, ride the Queen Mary..."

Sitting here, damn near 40 years later watching the sun go down and inventorying God's lightnin' bugs... It seems like only yesterday.

Rats on the Hoof by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

If you were lucky, the exec was happy, your division officer had an early tee time, the COB wanted to get an oil change, and Lady Luck wasn't in the middle of her period, they put down liberty at 1300 on Fridays.

For qualified non-rated personnel, there was only one way to see Norfolk and that was though the rear view mirror of a vehicle getting the hell outta town.

Trouble was, on E-3, sub, sea, and foreign duty pay, owning a car all by yourself was impossible. Flying was out of the question... No passenger trains in Norfolk... Round trip bus tickets could take a 50% bite out of a months pay... That left hitchhiking.

These were the pre-wierdo days. The days when a few beers and adventures behind bra hooks and panty elastic was as good and as far out as it got. Nobody wrapped themselves around chemically concocted crap that highjacked your ability to interact with the entire human race.

Somewhere between 1300 and sunset on Friday, half the naval vessels of the known world dumped their liberty sections, and Routes 460 and 17 became lined with raghats hauling AWOL bags. It was easy to pick out the boat sailors... The cheap bastards had those stupid looking green bunk bags... Those goofy things with four snap straps. You could overlap the two in the middle, snap 'em together and make a handle. What you created by doing this was a hootinanny arrangement that folded in the middle, was green and ugly and told every submariner operating without a seeing eye dog, that you were a boat sailor. It was very unsatisfactory luggage but a smoke boat sailor would burn flat spots in new tires to pick you up... It came with Dolphins.

(Author's note: Ray Stone, possibly the only man on the planet to still own a diesel boat bunk bag, a flat hat and Bells' locker club membership card, has recently been inducted into the Cheap Sonuvabitches Hall of Fame for calling his old, worn out bunk bag, carry-on luggage.)

There was an art to hitchhiking out of Norfolk. You had to develop a gimmick because the competition was astronomical. There were ten billion raghats and only "X" number of yankee tourists heading back to New Jersey. By the time you got to the York River bridge, the herd had thinned out... If you had a crutch (the duty hitchhiking crutch) and you stood at the stoplight, you always got a ride.

Above Yorktown there was a town called Gloucester, Virginia. It was a municipality populated by the most unpatriotic, worthless, no 'count, bushwacking sonuvabitches God ever made. If ever a community deserved an atomic bomb drop, it was Gloucester.

Gloucester was the county seat and had the county courthouse smack in the middle of town in a square... Literally, a square. You had to make four 90 degree turns to get through the gahdam town. The devious bastards created a zone where auto traffic went from 55 miles an hour to 12 miles an hour in a little over fifty feet. All the civic improvements in the county were subsidized by the systematic Friday Night Fleecing of the Fleet

The low-life animals of Gloucester set up a Winnebago-looking portable courthouse in a high school parking lot and created a drive through traffic court designed specifically to separate John Q. Bluejacket from his liberty money.

A one-legged midget wearing a deep-sea diving boot could get through town faster than you could legally drive. I personally own \$32.00 worth of something down there.

Once in a P.O.W. indoctrination, the instructor asked,

"What do you think your breaking point would be?"

"Chief... If the Russians got me, I think I could hold out until (A) they made me listen to two hours of Porter Wagner music or (B) attached high voltage electrodes to my testicles, at which point I would have no other choice but to tell them about the ultra-secret National Military Command Center concealed directly below Gloucester, Virginia."

If you're a citizen of Gloucester and you die... You go directly to Hell.. You don't pass "GO" and you don't collect two hundred dollars.

Up Route 17 there was a "Stuckeys" at Bowling Green. They made a living selling pecan logs to old ladies heading north. They also made great chili... Dime store chili with wall-to-wall kidney beans. We used to stop and get wrapped around a bowl of chili... I always got out of the car around DC, but I've heard stories about carloads of boat sailors driving past Baltimore in 20 degree weather with all the windows rolled down, once those kidney beans kicked in. If there's one thing all smoke boat lads fully understood, it was "BAD AIR."

On Sunday night heading back from DC, you had two choices. Trailways and Greyhound rolled out their 'old, worn out, pre on-board restroom vintage, wooden spoke-wheeled, worn out seats' buses with soon-to-be embalmed drivers. They were called N.O.B. Specials... The sign always read "NAVAL OPERATING BASE" and they left at midnight. They guaranteed you would make Monday morning quarters and set you back twelve bucks... Somebody always had to punch out one or two drunks so you could sleep.

Somewhere south of Tappahannock, the bus pulled off the highway so members of the sea-going armed forces could deliver processed Budweiser to a cornfield.

If you missed the last bus, your best chance for a ride was the parking lot at the *Dixie Pig Bar B Q* on Route One. The *Dixie Pig* was the place bluejackets who flirted with missing movement, stopped to find kindred spirits with gas money.

From 2200 to dawn, Routes #1 and #460 looked like the nocturnal return of the Mongol horde. While America slept, men whose sole purpose in life was the projection of naval

power throughout the world, were moving through Gloucester at 10 miles an hour, heading back to their ships.

Rumor had it Rickover sent limos with wet bars, TV and stewardesses for the lads who romanced radioactivity. Those guys had keys to the subterranean Gloucester by-pass... And the God-given good sense to stay the hell away from *Stuckeys* chili.

John Q. Boatsailor, Always a Class Act

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Ray Stone... Retired chief... Ex-petroleum-powered submarine sailor and Master of Socially Unacceptable Behavior, turned up at my front doorstep the other day. He had behaved himself for a complete 24 hours - in a row - so Toots attached his 20-foot logging chain leash and took him for a walk. When he arrived, he had two incredible e-mails.

The first was a real keeper from an ex-raghat from East Tennessee, who had some very heartwarming things to say about Ray's website. Hark, "...Elephants at a dime a herd?" Great stuff!! Ray and I damn near busted a gut. Thanks 'Cracker Box'... A real keeper.

Next, an e-mail from 'Tiger Flower'... Who'n the hell is Tiger Flower? Used to be a barmaid named 'Tiger'. Used to haul suds at the George Washington Bar outside the main gate at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth. Good looking little sweetheart, married to some can sailor, riding an old Fletcher 700 class antique, operating with DESRON 22. He was a lucky guy... She was his girl and she let you know it. If you made a pass, she would say,

"Back off bubblehead, I'm a tin can sailor's girl."

Then she'd wink, flip up her skirt and show you the two, three-bladed propellers embroidered in a three inch spread right smack in the seat of her panties.

"Twin screws and built for speed... Destroyer girl..."

Thelma at Bells never did that. Maybe that's something we can all be thankful for this Thanksgiving.

Tiger Flower? I read on through the e-mail... Holy Jumpin' Jeezus! This is not the 'Tin Can Tiger' from my diesel boat days, but an old teenage flame from years long ago. She was an absolute angel... One of God's sweetest creatures... One of a very limited number of female type personnel who could read my trash with forgiveness and understanding.

A gal whose beauty has stood the test of time and who never looks like she needs a yard period. A smiling lady who can pack a bra tighter than an electrician's bunk bag.

Tiger Flower's married to a Cracker Jack fellow. Our spouses are tolerant enough to permit the world's most passionate long distance platonic love affair to survive. Forty-five years... Gotta be some kind of record. Actually, I've always been in love with her mother... You can see where her beauty came from. Mary, her mother, got packaged with beauty at the Grace Kelly level. We're talking prettiness upon which teenage fantasies are built.

Unfortunately, the keeper of the harem, the husband and father, was an active duty high-ranking Army officer, with combat decorations running over his shoulder and three quarters of the way down his back. One mistake... One misinterpretation of honorable intent... One misguided secret thought about unknown treasure beyond forbidden nylon borders... And you knew beyond a shadow of any doubt, Col Pit Bull would have you for lunch.

The Sultan of the Harem let you know in no uncertain terms that he fully understood the circuitry of the male teenage mind and that flirtation, no matter how minor, with improper behavior within a ten-mile radius of Tiger Flower would without question, lead to your immediate destruction and eternal damnation. In short, you'd be tap dancing in the firey furnace with no parole. All thoughts of sub-elastic lingerie exploration could be immediately erased by one fleeting vision of Col Mad Dog ripping out your jugular vein. This only left long range, no hands love... The 45 year kind.

A small story by way of illustration... When I rode Requin some years later, Tiger Flower was to be married and I got an invitation. Her dad was then flag rank... Heavy duty bone crusher. I was at the time, an east coast smoke boat qualified E-3... Possibly the number one lightweight in the naval establishment. The general's favorite breakfast I am told, was two bowls of E-3s followed by a spit-roasted second lieutenant.

I was broke. We had just come in from punching invisible holes in the North Atlantic. Somewhere, between the Chesapeake lightship and making the turn around fort Wool, I showered, shaved and doused myself with the requisite two and a half gallons of Aqua Velva. In the early 60s, everyone in the navy knew that you had to cover up a diesel boat smell to be acceptable in anything resembling polite society. On the scale of social acceptability, submarine sailors registered four points below Mexican pimps, right above child molesting mass murderers. Aqua Velva was developed so those diesel boat sailors could disguise themselves to pass among those in polite society.

I threw a clean set of starched whites and a pre-pressed "greasy snake" neckerchief in a valpack and shoved off. There was magic in the old thumb and by morning I arrived at my destination, having hitchhiked through the night.

At the wedding, I was the token enlisted man and the singular representative of the naval establishment. John Q. Bluejacket... Dolphins... One lousy ribbon... You remember the red and yellow ribbon we called the 'bellybutton ribbon' because every sonuvabitch had one? I was up to my armpits in guys wearing every medal ever invented. If you

could have highjacked all the coats in that church, you could have opened up a thriving mail order war surplus business.

The bride was absolutely four-oh, knockout, beautiful... Hell, she was always four-oh beautiful but, there is something about a good looking girl in all white that makes you want to rake your antlers on pine tree bark... How did that guy up there with my long-range fantasy get past General Buttbuster? How did he break the code?

Well, the wedding concluded and the pride of the United States Submarine Service... Naval rep assigned to witness (at range) the forever-lost possibility of fantasy fulfillment... Left for the reception.

At this point, I would like to present my side in explanation for my subsequent behavior. I would like to use the "Sonuvabitches Sandbagged Me" defense.

I arrived at this very exclusive country club... We're talking the kind of place where guys who were dressed up like organ grinder monkeys, parked your car. Not the kind of place where you run into other boat sailors... You know, guys who rode boats in other squadrons... Guys you ran into everywhere you went... Places like, coincidentally peeing in the same alley in Panama. It wasn't that kind of place.

These people never heard of paper plates and Styrofoam cups. Everything was served in silver plated cups or on little crystal plates. They had a guy who shined your shoes when you hit the head (Thought about kidnapping the poor rascal and chaining him up in the head in Bells Bar).

The bride was off somewhere... You know, that place women go to giggle a lot and exchange coded information only understood by other women. The bride's mom looked like something Michelangelo whittled out on an exceptionally good day... One beautiful lady.

The father of the bride, displaying a ton and a half of hardware accumulated sending Germans and North Koreans off to Hell was circulating making it known that the bar was open and big time whiskey swilling was underway.

Not wanting to get a snoot full (Please re-read... Very important in my defense, considering what follows), I repeat... Not wanting to look like a typical torpedoman, I found this ginger ale fountain... This great big silver-plated contraption with three lion's heads... Big ol' silver lion heads with ginger ale squirting out of their mouths into this big silver bowl.

It had some kind of interior recirculating pump that kept recycling that cold ginger ale. All you had to do was hold a silver cup up to Mr. Lion and the rascal would spit you a cup full of ginger ale. I was really thirsty, so Mr. Lion and me did some heavy thirst quenching.

Problem... Mr. Lion was spitting out flat champagne... You pump French champagne over and over, and all the bubbles take off...Leaving what I was to discover was a consumable version of an anti-tank mine behind. It had a delayed fuse that went off between your ears that totally impaired your ability to behave like non-boat service personnel.

Shortly after my debilitating attack of armor piercing ginger ale, the bride appeared in all her radiant loveliness... At least, I think so... She was very out of focus and appeared to be on some kind of rotating amusement ride... And my kneecaps detected seismic disturbance taking place in the floor tile.

Someone announced that the bride was about to toss 'the garter'. At exactly this point in time, five of the seven dwarfs began to ice skate across the backside of my eyeballs and I was siezed by an acute attack of spinal jello-itis and space aliens from the planet Mongo highjacked all of my gentleman genes.

I heard this voice say something to the effect of,

"Dex... Here comes my garter!"

Then,

"Dex, what happened? I threw it right to you!"

Just at that moment I was the victim of what had to be transmigrating ventriloquism... Out of my idiotic mouth came,

"I'm waiting on your panties!"

History was made at this point. A former SUBRON Six diesel boat messcook and deck ape was given a brigadier general escort to his car and given directions to the North Pole.

I have my bride's permission to love this lovely lady... One of a very few people in my life who can take my nonsense for a very extended period of time.

Never got her panties... Should have... It was the least she could have done for a drunk boat sailor who traveled all night, stinking of over indulgence in Aqua Velva, to bring the Class of SUBRON Six to the festivities.

Razor Blades and Ivory Soap by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There was a point in time... All you lads who rode submersible iron will recognize the point... A point where you could tell exactly how long you had been out by the diameter

of the salt stain in the armpits of your last clean dungaree shirt. The point where all of your fellow inmates smelled like the inside of Olga Korbut's gym shorts.

At this point in the interest of human preservation and fear that his ship was taking on the internal atmosphere of the monkey house at the Chicago zoo... The Old Man would lift water restriction and allow 'white light' in the berthing compartments.

Men, who had lived and interacted in the dim glow of night vision-preserving red light, got a good look at each other for the first time in weeks. It wasn't a pretty sight...

"Jeezus, have I been living with these animals?"

The after battery looked like a garbage dump. Shredded ration boxes, stray socks... Magazines, loaded butt kits... Sour towels and a collection of dirty laundry that had matured to the point it was turning into limburger cheese.

It was a point far past the day we had wrapped ourselves around the last of the potatoes stored in the showers. The only visual evidence of their previous existence were the wadded up gunny sacks carpeting the deck of the after battery head and whatever GDU-delivered peels the fish off Nova Scotia were dining on... The 'Idaho's Best' rug in the sonar shack was the residual product of some previous deployment.

For those of you who never rode Uncle Sam's underseas technological treats, a smoke boat shower was an aluminum box the size of a coffin designed for Mickey Rooney. It had a shower head that delivered semi-hot water at the rate of five peeing humming birds and a shelf for soap that could leave a very distinctive purple mark on your upper biceps if the boat took a roll during occupancy... And a deck drain... A hole through which amazing things could appear if anyone put a pressure in number two sanitary tank without shutting the required gate valve and quick throw.

Even though you had to Crisco your ass to turn around in the damn thing, it was the closest thing to heaven a diesel boat sailor came in contact with at sea.

Everyone shucked his dungarees down to his skivvies... Grabbed a towel and his 'douche bag' (subsailor for shaving kit) and got in line. While guys rooted through sidelockers for their shower gear, towel fights broke out... Not Cub Scout towel flipping, serious heavy-duty towel popping. The kind that can take little chunks of hiney if you couldn't move and fend off the shot. Grown men laughing and popping each other with towels... Underseas recreation at its finest.

After a two-minute soapdown, scrub and a rinse, men would lather up and scrape off weeks of beard accumulation. Lifers who never shelled out for razor blades would say,

"Hey kid... How about seconds on that blade?"

Cheap bastards... Same guys that ran out of sea stores smokes after two weeks... Same guys who would wander around Bells filling their glass from any available pitcher. They are probably millionaires now and live by tax loopholes.

Bottles of Vitalis, Lucky Tiger, Mennens, Old Spice, Aqua Velva, and God knows what else, appeared from side lockers. In thirty minutes, the entire boat smelled like the parlor of the best whorehouse in New Orleans.

Adrian Stukey would break into a Ray Charles song and do his aboriginal dance... He employed footwork only known to Stukey and three Congolese witch doctors. The man had moves Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly never thought of... Sort of reminiscent of an electrocuted orangutan, mixed with the mating dance of the Australian Dingo eaters.

By some miracle, clean white skivvy shirts appeared. Some with the names of guys, who rode the boat five or six years previously, stenciled across the back.

"Who in the hell is Garabaldi, D. L.?"

"How'n the hell do I know?"

"Musta been some boat sailor."

"Yeh, I guess... What's it to you... You writing a gahdam book?"

"Maybe someday... Who knows?"

Nah... Who'd give a damn about reading stuff about this jacked up bunch of idiots? Who'd believe it? Once upon a time, I lived among people who volunteered to live like primates in an iron septic tank with lousy air, shared sleeping arrangements, had at least four leaks (air, oil, water, and security), made weird sounds, and agitated like a warped washing machine, for less money than you could fit into a gahdam gumball machine... Who'd read crap like that?

When the Goddess of Personal Hygiene looked down and blessed the residents of the roaming hotel SS-481... It was good.

It was also good to live among men who were right where they wanted to be... Nobody chloroformed them and hauled them off to New London. Nobody ever called their number at the Selective Service Board. They volunteered... Every gahdam one. Most of the world didn't even know they were there... Boats... Little primitive communities of the finest men I've ever known that lived in metal containers and took them to sea. There has to be a story in there somewhere.

The next time you see a Texaco tank truck rolling down the highway, just for a moment visualize it a couple of hundred feet underwater... Then picture thirty or forty happy-go-lucky half-naked men singing, doing silly dancing and towel fighting inside... And

willing to do whatever it took to keep nasty folks with weird political agendas from crawling through your bedroom window. Those lads were my shipmates.

Author's note: In the ensuing years, service under the sea has changed for the better. Lads today are not known as 'pig boat sailors'. Today's modern submersibles are more conducive to proper personal hygiene, grooming and gentlemanly attire. After a hard day of fission monitoring, switch flipping and gauge dickering, our present day subsurface bluejacket may attend a lecture on molecular configuration of high-density hydrocarbons emanating from the planet Mongo. He and soon to be, she, can opt for a live concert... Polo... Fencing or a little commingling in a hot tub... Mint Juleps followed by a shrimp cocktail precedes the evening meal after which those not engaged in ship's work or on watch are free to attend a visiting Broadway stage production or enjoy a Swedish massage in the crew comfort compartment.

Before retiring, he or she fills out his or her 'What I like about Naval Service' questionnaire which is handed to the first or second class bedtime story petty officer... Then after a telling of the 'Three Bears and the Call Girl' story, they say their 'God bless Hyman Rickover' prayer, drink their hot cocoa and turn in to their Martha Stewart approved poopy sacks to dream of super computers in accordance with current prescribed force policy.

It's a helluva lot better these days.

Warm Summer Nights by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Remember those summer nights... Full moon... Calm seas... Night steaming surfaced... Lookouts and O. D. on the bridge? Phosphorescent water slipping past the tank tops and sliding away aft into the glow of the stern light... Soft, light snapping made by the nylon ensign flying aft of the sail.

"Bridge, conn... Permission to lay to the bridge."

"Granted."

"Sir... Got two blond and sweets and a black and bitter."

"Very well."

"Dex, take a sweep around... Report your contacts then drop down and give 'em a hand with the coffee."

"Aye sir... Can at about zero-eight-zero still holding position... Lights at one-one-zero, possible fishing boat, closest point of approach considering running lights would put her well aft."

"Very well... Permission to lay below."

"Lay below aye, Stuke, watch that can for me."

You always zipped your 7x50s in your jacket. Swinging binoculars could hit a ladder step when you rode the rails down. If they bounced off a step, they could bust your nose or do a job on your front teeth. A little lesson even a dimwit could figure out after one bloody experience.

Coffee always tasted great after midnight. You got that Iguana plasma, bottom of the pot stuff... So strong, you could damn near whittle off chunks to chew on. Caffeine at the 'wake the dead' level. Great stuff.

Night steaming meant the chief standing watch on the hydraulic manifold had nothing to do but tell lies about the 'Old Navy' and make sure folks ran coffee to the guys 'on the roof'.

There is no closer group on the face of the earth than an underway watch section. After forty years, I still remember how they all took their coffee and who you could bum a non-filtered cigarette from.

I take a lot of undeserved shots at the guys who bummed stuff at sea. In Mesa, Arizona, I can hear my old running mate, Adrian Stukey turning to his lovely bride and saying,

"Who is Dex kidding? I'd like to have a gahdam nickel for every time the worthless sonuvabitch fished my pack out of my dungaree pocket and hit me up... Must have a very selective memory!"

To tell the truth, boat sailors were the most generous people I have ever known. That needs to be said.

An upturned white hat on a mess table was a silent signal that indicated someone on the boat needed you to dig in your pocket to fund something.

One instance comes to mind... Came through the messdeck and there was an upturned raghat with a little piece of paper... 'Little Requin angel needs first communion dress.'

One old barnacle-encrusted engineman tossed in a twenty... Drew a cup of coffee, looked at the cook and said,

"What'n the hell's a communion dress?"

That was Requin.

He also said,

"Boy, THAT'S a switch... Some Requin sailor wanting to put a dress ON a female."

John T., if you're alive, we all knew what a selfless, giving rascal you were. I tried to say 'thanks' to you one night in '60... A little gal I dated at Mary Washington college, came down to Norfolk to visit family. I didn't have a dime and a nickel to rub together... Hit everyone aboard up to scrape together money to pick up my blues that had been re-piped in Bells Naval Tailors, and fund a modest dinner. When I went to pick up my blues, the lady said the work was paid for... And she smiled and told me to look in the jumper pocket - It had \$25 folded up inside.

You were in Bells smoking one of your gawdawful cigars and shooting eight ball. I tried to thank you and tell you I'd pay you back, and you said,

"I have no gahdam idea what you're talking about... Didn't your mother teach you not to interrupt grown men shooting pool? Get the hell outta here!"

You took a shot and told some burnt out barmaid,

"Requin is crawling with idiots like that..."

John T., we had crabcakes and Pepsi out at Ocean View.

The bridge on a summer night was a great place to be. Some nights, a signalman would haul up a signal light and fill the night with light flashes that exchanged greetings and information that radiomen could have swapped with a lot less trouble in a helluva lot less time... One of those questions far beyond E-3 comprehension.

Some nights, porpoise would leap in the bow wave... That is something guys who did time in the Wisconsin Guard missed.

One thing about the North Atlantic... When the wake closes in and the foam settles back, there is nothing to mark your passage... Nothing but the pictures in your head.

Tell Ray to Stop by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I was watching the Discovery Channel the other night and they were showing scenes from the nuclear power school... In the lobby, they had this larger-than-life bronze bust of Admiral Rickover. Over the years, a tradition had evolved... Each sailor passing would give the old admiral a rub on the nose. Suffice it to say, Rickover got issued a rather prominent proboscis.

It was also evident that the statuary's original patina had long vanished, leaving the father of atomic propulsion with a bright brass schnozz.

(Sung to the tune of 'Rudolph, the Red-Nose Reindeer')

"Hyman, the shifty-eyed Rickover...

Had a very shiny nose...

And if you ever saw him...

You would even say it glows.

All of the other smokies...

Used to laugh and call him names...

He wouldn't let his nukeys...

Join in any grab-ass games."

If I have told Ray once, I have told him a thousand times... Quit scaring little children.
Forgive us, Gene Autry.

Lingerie Beneath the Sea by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I guess I should stay the hell out of this 'women on the boats' stuff. I have a God-given talent for stepping in the gumbo strictly by accident without intentionally seeking out cobra pits to jump into... But, I figured that I had better come out of the closet before some Requin shipmate pinned the tail on my donkey.

First, I'm an old fashioned Cro-Magnon bluejacket... Love women... Loved 'em so much that when I went north and learned about homosexuality, I thought it was great... Figured it would favorably adjust the odds of a broke E-3 getting laid. I later learned that there were actually two homosexuals in East Tennessee but they never came out in the daytime so nobody had actually seen them.

In the late fifties, early sixties, women were the best they've ever been. If you were lucky enough to capture one and freeze her attitude against evolutionary change known as progress, you got a real keeper.

They were soft and fluffy, and smelled great... Jergens lotion... Palmolive soap... Radio Girl perfume... Painted toenails packaged in lace and protected by Houdini-tested bra hooks. They were real women... Those little darlings could tie you in knots or make you feel like Paul Bunyan on dope.

In the late 60's when insanity ruled, women became shaggy, raggedy-ass creatures for some reason that was never made clear to me. I missed the relevant connection between poor personal hygiene and the advancement of a political conviction. But then, I was still pulling for some kind of Hail Mary, fourth quarter long bomb when the North

Vietnamese regulars were pole vaulting over the Saigon embassy wall. I had this wonderful plan to drop six or eight megaton nuclear devices in North Vietnam so all the soldiers would come home to see if their folks were still around... So much for 'Why I will never be president'... Make that reason number 2,463.

Back to women... They never recovered from the sixties. Take a high school kid today... Takes Mary Lou to the prom... On the way home, they drop anchor at the local goody bush... When the poor kid finally gets the package unwrapped, his main squeeze is wearing women's gray cotton jockey underwear. For crissakes, who came up with that 'best forgotten' idea? And what genius invented panty hose? Makes romance appear a lot like skinning a water moccasin. Give me an old fashioned girl... Bright red Doris Day lipstick and a black lace garter belt and I would chew my way through the pressure hull to lay alongside.

Women today are really different... Have no idea why... Why a female journalist would go to court and sue for the right to go into a major league locker room to interview ball players with their tallywackers hanging out... Never got a handle on that one... Often wondered if her successful verdict meant that if I was having a slow day, I had the right to wander into the ladies room and shoot the Tampax machine until I ran out of dimes.

Can't figure out feminists, either. Why in the hell would a good lookin', A-number-one dream goddess want to rush hell-bent into boxing or professional wrestling? I'm not so damn sure the world really needs roller derby queens. I got the idea that this whole generation of screwball females won't be happy until they are shaving their mustaches off everyday and peeing standing up. For what? Just to establish they have the right to do it? Hell, we all have the right to shove a beer can up our gahdam nose... But who in the hell thinks it's a good idea? Just because you have the right to do something, doesn't mean it's a good idea.

I missed the turn in the road where motherhood, sweet gentleness and lace panties became a bad idea.

Now here is where I do the swan dive into the soup...

War is bad enough... Horrid enough... Nasty, stinking and bloody enough without:

(1) Adding to the frigging stupidity of men having to witness the destruction of what they should have been taught by caring mothers, is that most dear thing in life, womanhood... And:

(2) Taking away from a lad engaged in combat, the vision of being the protector of goodness, defender of home and hearth and champion of fair ladies.

And last, what heavy-duty combat man wants to include in his mental album of combat memories, the vision of a female messmate with her chest blown open or having

unwanted gang sex in a POW camp where he is powerless to intercede? Why would any woman rush headlong to hang those possibilities around a good man's neck?

There are things that men should not do... You shouldn't peek under a nun's habit... And there are a couple of things you shouldn't do if you are the primary tenant in the White House. Sure you can do it, but it simply isn't a good idea. Women on subs, no matter how tame they have become... No matter how gentlemanly, sensitive and considerate the crews have become... No matter the level of self-control mastery... Women on submarines is a jacked-up stupid idea, condoned and supported by cringing sheep that man the highest positions in our Navy... Men with birdshot-size testicles who should don paperbags on their heads when passing the oil painting of Arleigh Burke in the CNOs corridor in the pentagon. You could boil the entire admiral corps in today's navy and you wouldn't get a good bowl of soup for a sick man.

Having said that, you men have no idea what kind of heat I have generated for myself. Only Stone and Hemming have a clear picture of the future level of armor-piercing incoming I face.

Why? Because I am the extremely proud father of a daughter who is a high-performance paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division... Master parachutist wings... Wears in addition, Australian Airborne qualification wings... Current jumpmaster regularly discharging that responsibility... Went into Iraq on Attack 1991... Bad jump on return compression fracture L-1 vertebrae... Recovered... C.O. of division sends her for O.C.S. selection... Attends O.C.S. at infantry school, Benning... Is awarded Jess Wall's saber on graduation... Distinction reserved for 'Demonstration of exceptional academic and leadership during course'... Very big juju in Army.

Currently commanding the Headquarters Company of the aviation brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division... Green Tab Captain.

The young lady has been convinced for years that her old man's opinion has a very low par value... So that's nothing new... And I don't think she reads the stuff I write. That's probably a good thing.

However, in the off-chance she might get hold of a copy, I can be contacted in East Bubblegum, South Dakota... Living with the snorkel gang under the assumed name of Henry R. Manifold... Either that or I'll be bunking with Jimmy Hoffa.

Christmas at Sea by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Boy, that was a real downer... The Old Man coming on board and gathering all the animals topside, forward of the sail... Guys with steaming cups of coffee in ratty foul weather gear with the COB yelling,

"Knock it off! Pipe down ladies... Knock it off... The Captain has an announcement... Settle down... Stand easy... Gahdammit, STOW IT!!"

Nothing that came down from squadron ops was good to hear, especially if the skipper had that 'My dog just died' look.

"Listen up gentlemen... It looks like we'll be out over Christmas... On the bright side, the boat is scheduled to pull in on the 28th. in time for New Years. I'm going to talk it over with the COB and see if we can work out something to leave a few of our older married men with families in."

Now, there's a good deal... Christmas out, standing port and starboard watches...

"Jeezus wants me for a sunbeam!"

"What are you whining about? When you signed up for the boats, what'n hell did you think submarines were supposed to do? Hang around the friggin' pier so you and Rudolph can play grabass?"

"Yeah Dickerson... You and the horse you rode in on..."

"Maybe we'll go north and catch Mrs. Santy Claus in her nightie while her old man is outta town."

(There was a standing joke in the boats in our day... When you pulled alongside after being out a long time... You told the married guys to take a grenade with them. When they got home, they should knock on the front door, yell,

"Honey, I'm home!",

count to ten, pull the pin on the grenade, toss it over the roof and nail the Marine crawling out the back window.)

"Gentlemen, you heard what the Old Man said... Give you ten minutes to finish coffee, scratch your butt, piss and moan among yourselves, then we form loading parties... Merry Christmas, my little darlings..."

The COB pulled the wings off butterflies as a kid... Somewhere, Navy surgeons had removed all of his kind and gentle impulses and installed the personality of a prostate-plagued porcupine.

"Okay, put your cups inside the sail door, toss the butts over the side and become the little Santa's elves I know you are. Form loading parties and hit the lower brow on Orion."

Never understood why they stored everything you needed on Orion in the forward holds and you had to haul it all aft to the lower brow. I would also bet a dollar to a donut that every report card the COB got as a kid said, "Talks too much"... He once delivered a twenty minute speech to the entire population of Hogan's Alley concerning the erosive disrespect of calling the Goat Locker, "Toad Hall".

So we moaned... We groaned... Then we sucked it up and went to sea. Nothing can tube morale like churning up saltwater over Christmas.

During the few days before Christmas, all sorts of non-regulation nonsense broke out... We all hung dirty socks on the overhead vent line in the Alley with a hand-written sign made out of a cardboard pea carton flap that read, 'In hopes that St. Nickolas soon would be there"... The cooks made mincemeat pies whose main ingredient came from a couple of bootleg fifths that mysteriously turned up in the lower flats of the after engine house. For one whole wonderful night, we knew what it must be like to work the graveyard shift in a distillery. The wardroom either turned a blind eye or suffered from a helluva case of collective poor sense of smell.

We doctored up the words to traditional Christmas music to turn these songs of peace and goodwill to men, into tunes that would make a sewer digger blush. Looking back, we turned doo-doo into the stardust as only boat sailors can do... And did.

Christmas eve arrived and found us bouncing around on the surface somewhere in the middle of God's great ocean and then it started... Over the magic airwaves came an avalanche of some of the lamest bullshit that ever flowed from the pen of man... Greetings from every half-baked politician or top-heavy admiral in Washington... Up to, if not including, the SECNAV's cat.

"Tonight I know our men and women of the armed forces are standing their vigilant watches throughout the far-flung reaches of our vast globe... To those of you safeguarding the ramparts of peace and freedom, I send the warmest greeting from those of us here by the hearth of home fires. We want you to know that on this night of cheer and celebration, our hearts go out to you and your loved ones in wishing for a safe and speedy return to a most grateful nation... Merry Christmas and God bless, we hold you in our thoughts this night... Rear admiral William P. Numbnuts USNR, COMDOOFUSLANT."

Horseshit rained on our radio shack for hours. Each was read outloud with all the appropriate emotion by an idiot standing on a potato locker bench in the crew's mess... Morale soared with every disrespectful crack. From the radio shack came,

"Here comes another one... Wait 'til you get a load of this simple sonuvabitch... He wishes he could be with us!"

And so it went... Out of control laughter... Men who couldn't have cared less, listened to hand-crafted crap and rolled on the deck. Adrian Stukey was in his element with his accompanying commentary...

"Hey Stuke... You think these guys actually think up this hogwash?"

"Hell no... They have this third class diddledick in the basement of the pentagon who spends all year writing this stupidity."

And they just kept on coming... When we couldn't take it anymore and were totally worn out from laughing, we turned into our bunks.

In the wee hours of the morning, we hit some floating object the size of a phone pole. It sounded like a railroad locomotive wheel bounced off bow bouyancy and whacked a couple of ballast tanks on its way aft.

"What the hell was that?"

"Three men on camels in a rowboat!"

And the laughing started all over again. Somewhere in the night, Christmas came to a bunch of good-hearted, totally unimpressed men, snoring in the after battery, dreaming of mince pie, turkey roll and all the bug juice a man could want... And life was okay.

And the belowdecks watch made his rounds... Number two got blown and vented inboard... And amid the glow of red light, amid the cases of cans, stinking laundry and assorted rumpled foul weather gear, could be found the Defenders of the Free World in gentle repose... While visions of bar maids danced in their heads.

Ravings of a Half-Baked Coot by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I keep returning to the impersonal nature of naval engagements in our technological age.

Two hundred years ago, naval warfare took place at 'biscuit-tossing range'. Men stood behind gunports and slammed shot down heated bores, ran the guns 'back to battery' and jerked lanyards that sent salvo after salvo across a small expanse of ocean. They watched the immediate effect of their effort... Masts fell... Tackle and sail crashed to the deck... Chunks of smashed gunwale flew everywhere... Broken railing sailed through the air... And the toll taken in blood and bone was plainly evident.

In the ensuing years, the range increased to the radius of the horizon. Ship to ship... Men to men... Only aircraft carriers did their business beyond the visual limit of the horizon. I never had to deal with any 'out of sight' targets during my tour. Once combat contact extended beyond the horizon, beyond visual confirmation of effect, naval

warfare lost something. Submarines became seagoing platforms to UPS packages of extraordinary devastation to impersonal destinations where entire multiple zip codes disappeared... And there was absolutely no risk or interruption of the boat's scheduled routine. No longer did a four-fish spread guarantee a boat would enjoy several hours of depth charge evasion... No longer did men in the conn rotate to get a scope view of a target going down. No longer did crews get instant confirmation of their combat effectiveness.

The World War II submariner did not have to await battle damage reports gathered by daylight photo flyovers by the Air Force... He simply counted the number of Jap bluejackets doing the breast stroke in the burning oil and applied the multiplier required by the class vessel... And the Old Man pulled out his copy of Jane's and drew an 'X' through the appropriate name and description.

This generation of boatsailor cut his teeth on Nintendo games.

Our generation grew up in a world of highly personalized adventures where the good guys sunk the bad guys and RKO brought it to your neighborhood movie house, to bait the gang hooks supplied by local Navy recruiters.

There was no GI Bill... There was no 'Let us pay for your education' either... There wasn't even a 'We want you and will do whatever fifty doo-dah dance you require' in order to join.

No, in the fifties, they said they would give you \$34 every two weeks, three squares and a flop a day, a world of unique wonders... And a free bus ride to Great Lakes.

We watched 'Silent Service'... We recognized that Dolphins didn't come cheap... Atomic propulsion was still a novelty and at eighteen, your view of the future ended 'next Wednesday'. We knew that the new subs wouldn't last... Ships were supposed to slice through the water, not push a fifty-yard bow wave. Arleigh Burke would never buy a concept where his ships would leave a wake wider than the Los Angeles freeway.

My view of combat sailing always involved sweating, powder-blackened or greasy bluejackets, loading, firing and reloading. Victory was decided within sight.

No slight intended, but I feel fortunate that it was that way all during my tour. I was an old fashioned kid... Grew up on pirate books... 'The Romance of Fighting Sail'... Scrapping toe-to-toe... Slugging it out... Boarding and bringing about a result by pistol and cutlass.

And Silent Service the TV show was the flypaper that sucked in a daydreamer from East Tennessee.

Interesting thought... Do high school girls daydream in algebra class of sweating in a forty-millimeter gun tub, slamming flak up at Jap planes? Do they ever write 'Handling

hot shell on a five-inch thirty-eight' in the blank that reads 'Occupational preference'? Did they ever go up and down a busy highway searching for enough empty pop bottles to buy a movie ticket for Operation Pacific? Do they stay an extra hour at the beauty parlor to hear an old gal tell about rough days and hard times in the service? Do women have 'No shitters'? Just a thought. I'm not trying to light the fuse to bring out the lunatic fringe, I truly wonder. If they are going to put 'em on combat boats... Undersea war vessels, you wonder when the 'Call of the Bluejacket' hits them. It's sure going to make peeing down the forward room pit log well during battle stations an interesting event.

It's a good thing the Dept. of the Navy doesn't send some clown to your house to pick up your Dolphins when you grow old and start rubbing folk's fur the wrong way.

Great thing about the boat service... You can always find five or six guys who'll agree with you if for no other reason than the enjoyment submariners get from bar brawls...

None of this will get me on Hillary's Christmas card list.

The Life of a Blanket Thief by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Your hull number was your address... Just like rural post boxes... Sort of land-based channel markers that a drunk could use to navigate home.

There is something about a couple of gallons of draft beer... It had a dual effect... You peed a lot and forgot where your boat was nested.

I used to wander down the pier until I could find a big '481' in white numbers on the conning tower fairwater, then negotiating the brows of the inboard boats, saluting the ensigns aft and the topside watch while mumbling,

"Permission to become a board..."

Like instantly we would turn ourselves into chunks of lumber. It was silly and stupid... Childish and very funny to an 18-year old what was half in the bag.

When you hit your boat, you were home free... Topside watch would say,

"How bad off are you? Can you make it without bouncing off the tank tops and making me fish you out with the boat hook?"

"Sure..."

"Don't use the forward escape trunk hatch."

"How come?"

"Pogo just put non-slip on the bear trap steps and two, the exec and skipper are aboard sleeping. The last thing they need is an after battery 'three sheets to the wind' deck ape, ricocheting off the forward battery passageway bulkheads. Do us all a favor and use the after battery hatch."

"Anything for you, oh Nocturnal Guardian of Peace and Freedom... And wardroom kiss-ass."

"Dex... Jack said to tell you that there are some cans of peaches on the shelf in the cool room and some ice cream just inside the reefer door."

"Thanks... Laying below..."

"Hey Dex... John T. has the below decks... Tell him to run me up a black n' bitter."

"Sure thing..."

"Look out below!! One-eyed marine with a baby droppin' down!"

The after battery passageway was always obstructed by a tangle of arms and legs hanging out of bunks containing the worst collection of Olympic contending snoring sailors on either coast. No red light in port... You moved toward the mess decks slowly to keep from tripping over shoes or crushing the knuckles of the 'sock-sniffers' in the lower passageway racks. Once inside the crew's mess, you got white light... And maybe the tail end of some card game.

"Hey Dex, you hit the beach with Stukey?"

"Yeah... Went over to Bells. Quiet night... Just two other 481 sailors in there... Peto and Rip." "No shit?" "No shit, Sherlock... They had some action across the boulevard at the Victory... Big 'O's or some surface craft bar on that side of Hampton. Cops came... Shore patrol... Full nine yards."

"Anyone get hurt?"

"Ambulance came... Didn't see 'em haul anyone off... Still peaches in the hole?"

"Should be... Want me to drop down and toss you up a can?"

"Sure... Fish in the hole!... Hey webfoot, how 'bout a couple of oranges?... Thanks fish!"

(On Requin, if someone did you a favor, you called them a 'fish', which was submarine for 'sucker'... And for the old guys... Veteran ship's company, it was the same as saying 'Thank you'... Don't ask me why... Never figured it out.)

"Here's your peaches!"

"Thanks, fish."

"Who's aboard?"

"The Old Man... Exec... Four or five officers... Dutch... Buster... Duty section. Stukey came back an hour ago. By the way, the kid ran guard mail up on 'Mother Onion' (Tender, USS Orion (AS-18)) and picked up a sack of 'flat mail'... They passed in out in the control room... Called your name out four of five times."

"Someone answer up for me?"

"Conaty... Think he stuck it in the battery mailbox."

For those of you who never did time in the alley, the after battery mailbox was between the flashpad and bunk chain, middle rack aft, above the battery well access.

"You guys show a flick tonight?"

"Started one... Sonuvabitch stunk... Everybody got up and left then Bullwinkle and Rocky got in an argument over some stupid bullshit question on the ET test... So we secured the flick... Rewound what we'd shown and the duty MPO hit the rack."

"Where's Dutch?"

"Playing poker aft."

"Wish I had his money."

"Stick around for thirty, make seven war patrols, let nasty people park depth charges on your roof ten to fifteen times... Then you'll make the kinda bucks Big Daddy hauls in."

"Hey Crisco, whatz' fer breakfast?"

"Open galley, sweetheart."

"Not that f*ckin' scrapple?"

"No scrapple..."

"What is that crap anyway? Bobby Ray said it was some kind of possum Spam."

"Nasty stuff.. Folks intentionally eat that stuff?"

" Yeah... Folks from West Virginia... You tell the idiots it's food... They'll eat it."

"Watch your mouth... Yankee."

"Hey, West Virginia sure as hell isn't a rebel state... Broke off from Virginia and sided with the north... They may eat black-eyed peas and grits, but they're fakes."

"You guys get in a charge?"

"Yeah kemosabe... Topped off an hour ago."

"Anyone heard from Pistol Pete?"

"Still in the hospital over in Portsmouth... Got a good-lookin' nurse according to the skipper."

"Well ladies, it's late... Time for my beauty sleep..."

"Dex, don't mean to bust yur bubble but your beauty sleep ain't workin'."

"Screw you... Look who's talkin'... Like a bullfrog callin' a catfish 'big mouth'."

After midnight, it was easy to locate an empty rack when you were in port... And guys were sound asleep, making blanket-stealing a helluva lot easier.

There was a technique to blanket theft. First, you crawled in the rack... Preferably, a middle rack... Then you reached across the passageway and grabbed the bitter-end of the blanket covering the unsuspecting, soon to be victimized bastard, sleeping in the top rack.

Then a massive two-handed yank... The blanket leaves and you quickly stuff the blanket between you and the outboard side lockers. Thus, from the angle of observation from a top rack, you appeared to have no blanket, lying there on your back, snoring... After three minutes, you pulled the blanket over you and were home free.

In the old days, you couldn't qualify until you could successfully steal a blanket from a four-hashmark Chief in the Goat Locker, or off the exec in the wardroom.

To become a Watusi warrior you had to spear a lion... To be a smoke boat sailor, you had to deprive a rate-heavy lifer of warmth and security in a high-speed 'Now you see it - now you don't' blanket heist... Or, if you were the kind of guy who goes duck hunting before dawn and uses a truck headlight to locate ducks sleeping on the water to shoot... Then you can always wait until the below decks watch wakes an old Chief for a 0200 piss call... You know, that time in the wee hours (no pun intended) of the morning when E-8s and E-9s got up to return kidney-filtered beer to the Elizabeth River.

At that, little darlings, was the way it was in the smoke boat service of yesteryear.

Submarines Need E-3s by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Someone told me recently that they don't have E-3s on nuke boats... They may have been handing me the big horn swoggle, but they also told me that 2nd and 3rd class POs pulled messcooking. Got me to thinking... What would an E-3-less submarine force be like?

How in the hell does the boat get painted? Is there a saltwater Earl Scheib? Maybe they found a way to build non-rusting, dipped-in-plastic boats... Maybe there is no such thing as a deck force anymore. Who does the donkey work? Do the stores get loaded by robotics?

No E-3s? What is a boat like with no E-3s? Who livens up long days when you are plowing unseen subsurface furrows in endless acres of saltwater? Do they still have life aboard or just crews of highly regulated prancing ponies? You can't help wondering.

I would not begin to understand the 'lessons learned' during and after World War II... I surely would not understand any rationale that cut E-3s out of their chunk of the nuke boat pie.

The good ol' submarine force... The old 'Throw another log on the fire, 21 knots surfaced and damn the floating crap' smoke boats loved their E-3s. When Hyman the Magnificent opted for a more serious, professional, totally squared-away, 'I will horsewhip transgressors' sub force over a carefree family of hormone-active, bright kids who not only did their jobs but took time to light off a hot foot or two, boat service may have lost something.

Until science can come up with monkeys who can qualify, it would appear to me that a place should exist for E-3s. We were good... We did the jackass work... Nukes don't need lookouts. They only surface to pick up laundry, chow and re-enlist... Or shipover... Hell, I have no idea what they call it now. Somebody has to stand planes and helm watch, don't they? Some idiot has to show movies or operate some giant VCR... Who dumps one and two-way? Maybe they use a molecular vaporizer and protoplasmic regenerator that converts 'one and two-way' into Three Musketeers bars for the wardroom.

I guess when they started building boats that could run underwater for an entire college semester without coming up for air or a battery charge, the last thing they needed were a mob of 19 year-olds who needed to get laid regularly or they would explode or go blind.

So much of what I associated with submarine duty... What was so accurately depicted in the German film *Das Boot*, is gone now.

Folks a helluva lot brighter than I'll ever be, could probably make a compelling case for the necessity of change... For the exclusion of levity and lighthearted interaction. The increase in the level of complexity and sophistication of modern day submersibles, require elevated levels of concentration and seriousness of purpose. We would have made lousy nuke boat submariners. I always felt you could only look at gauges and turn valves so long before you started to lose your mind. If gauge-watching, valve-adjustment and report-writing was your life's ambition when I was a kid... You signed up for an overtime shift at the sewage processing plant.

E-3s were the Bedouins of the Fleet. When the COB needs three 20-foot sections of non-collapsible hose... The necessary bronze couplings... Manifold adapters, ship's service air reducers... Does he get out his official handy-dandy fleet supply catalog and do the navy-mandated dick dance? Or does he call in his qualified E-3 combination cumshaw artist and cat burglar?

"Dex... I am visualizing three sections of non-collapse with all the gedunk necessary to tie in a pneumatic rotary grinder to our 225 system... I am picturing a coil of long-neglected hose with all the associated previously named goodies... This hose presently resides on a bulkhead hook... In the sheetmetal shop on Mother Onion. When I saw it last, it told me it was lonely and needed a new home."

All submarine E-3s immediately recognized that the COB had just handed the deck force a Smoke Boat Larceny License.

"Go thou forth among your fellow man... Misappropriate... Redirect, convert... Loot, pillage, burn, and rape... Lay waste to the countryside... Don't stop to bury your dead... Just turn up with hose and all the crap needed to fire off some air-operated grinder."

That is just one small reason to own a couple of non-rated animals. E-3s are thieves without equal... Can speak fluent bullshit, a language understood by every enlisted man in the supply chain... Can shuffle through a paint locker, storage cabinet or padlocked supply room and surgically remove designated items with the skill of world-renown surgeons who operate on wildcat hemorrhoids.

The Navy needs men like these... Even nukes. Wholesale theft is a submarine tradition... A large number of non-submarine sailors looked upon enlisted Dolphins as the designator for Master Thief. There were supply clerks who damn near made a boat sailor strip to his skivvies and have an escort before he could enter a supply room.

The Requin crew stole a Coke machine and dropped it into the mess decks when we got the tender to cut a hard patch for battery cell replacement. By the time the damn thing was mounted... The serial number data plate and Marine Corps inventory number had been cold-chiseled off and the whole thing painted #7 gray. We mounted an inclinometer on the front... We found that in a rolling sea, a nickel dropped in at 8 degrees on the return roll, would clear the coin acceptance solenoid and give you a Coke. We didn't load the paper cup feeder... You poked your Pyrex cup in the front

before dropping your nickel in. Failure to do so allowed you to watch your nickel's worth of Coke pass by on its way to #2 sanitary... All Coke eventually would up in a sanitary tank but 'no coppers' bypassed the kidneys.

When you get a deck force that can walk off with a Coke machine, you've got a jewel.

We used to ride around NOB collecting stuff that could be made portable with boltcutters. We didn't have to have an immediate need... As long as it could be considered future trading material, we loaded it in the truck.

The squadron assigned pierhead Quonset huts to the boats for 'home port' paint lockers. Ours looked like a cross between Aladdin's cave and Sanford and Son.

The boats need E-3s... If for no other reason than to have an attentive population that will listen to old Chief Petty Officers without recognizing how totally full of shit they are.

Battle Stations by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

"Battle stations torpedo... Battle stations torpedo."

No other words, other than shouting "Fire!" at the World Series, can ignite pandemonium like "Battle stations torpedo."

Grown men go nuts... Stark, raving nuts. While still half-asleep, you reach for your Mammy Yokum boots while a two-way idiot stampede breaks out. Men yelling "Gangway!" hurdle over you going in both directions. Don't stop to dress, just grab your gear and haul boogie.

My first assignment was 'Captain's phone talker'... When Lincoln freed the slaves, somehow he missed the Captain's phone talker. If you look up 'totally worthless bastard' in any dictionary, in any language, it states,

"Foremost among worthless bastards you will find Captain's phone talker."

It's a cross between a cigar store Indian and a ventriloquist's dummy. There are a number of first order primates who could have been trained for the job. I never understood how anyone in their right mind would think being the bridge hand-puppet was a desirable position.

"Well, if it isn't the wardroom handmaiden to the prince."

"Will somebody tell Manny, Moe and Curly they have an understudy?"

"Hey Dex... Is it true? Does the skipper actually pull a string to make your mouth work?"

Being the skipper's Howdy Doody was a bullshit watch station. I think the submarine force created the job to test new kids for their crap absorption capacity... To see how big a doo-doo cargo a kid could haul.

The Captain's phone talker had to tie his XJA headset cable to a phone jack near the conning tower hatch and haul the dangling 20 foot cable around, with the phone attached to his chest, all during battle stations. No one ever invented a way to clean the inside of the earpieces of an XJA headset... Years of accumulated earwax and sweat made them a major treat to the human nostril.

"Forward torpedo room, manned and ready..."

"Forward battery, manned and ready..."

"After battery, manned and ready..."

"Control, manned and ready..."

And so it went... When the entire inventory of lunatics had reported in, Jocko, the skipper's personal communication monkey, would report,

"Captain... Ship manned and ready."

"Very well."

That's all officers said. They said it all the time... I think there is a two-semester course at Annapolis where prospective officers are taught that all you ever have to say in response to anything a raghat reports is "Very well."

"Captain, the cook just shot the below decks watch... Fire in the forward engine room... Mutiny underway in the after torpedo room... Communist frogmen are climbing our screwguards and the Pope has just been drafted by the Celtics."

"Very well."

After things settled down and the crew figured out that it was all a drill and not a case where Requin was about to strike a blow for mom, apple pie and national survival, the animals started hinting that it sure would be nice if the skipper would 'light the smoking lamp.'

"Dex... If the Old Man is in a good mood... You know, smiling and bullshitting with the lookouts and OD... Ask him if it would be okay to fire up the gahdam smoking lamp."

"Dex, what's the problem, babe? If the Old Man is in a bad mood, click your 'press to talk' button twice... Good mood, click once... Not a good time to ask, pop it three times."

"Hey Dex... Ol' pal... Offer the Old Man a smoke, then say, 'Sir, can we light the lamp?'"

"DEX, YOU DEAF SONUVABITCH!! WHAT'S THE PROBLEM!? CAN'T YOU FIGURE OUT SOME KIND OF NICOTINE RELIEF DEAL WITH YOUR BIG SEA DADDY!? YOU WORTHLESS, NO GOOD, NON-RATED IDIOT!! IF WE FIND OUT YOU AND THE SKIPPER HAVE BEEN BURNING BUTTS ON THE BRIDGE WHILE WE HAVE BEEN HAVING THE LUCKY STRIKE D.T.'s... YOU GONNA DIE!!"

After nearly a year, I graduated from phone monkey to just another serf in the kingdom and when put up for adoption by the COB, became a member of the forward torpedo room Loony Tunes.

They always fed you sandwiches on battle stations... Never understood why... You have to break watertight integrity to pass a tray with lousy donkey dick, hard salami sandwiches the same amount of time it would take to pass in two roast turkeys and a steamship round of beef.

Okay, lets say that it had to be sandwiches... Did they have to consist of armadillo baloney and tire patch cheese? We saw the movie Ben Hur... In there, they had Charlton Heston chained to an oar down in the lower flats of this Roman light cruiser... This guy walked up and down, bullwhipping the guys to get them to row faster. Some guy on the quarterdeck... Marcus Gladius Wayne, I think... Points out the arrival of the massive Egyptian fleet. It's quiet in the after battery messdeck... You could hear a pin drop. Then, someone spoke up,

"Battle stations... Battle stations, spears and arrows... Break out the damage control cheese and donkey dick."

On nuke boat battle stations, you phone up the Chief for dinner reservations and if you don't like the entrees being offered, you can call the Pizza Hut petty officer and get compartment delivery.

LT Noel K. Schilling, USN by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

He was, put simply, a submariner... Actually, a submariner's submariner. The man forgot more about submarines than most of us ever knew and he held all the patents on unauthorized behavior as an enlisted man. Rumor had it that the Department of the Navy commissioned him for the return of an aircraft carrier and a couple of tin cans the CNO lost to him in a poker game... It was probably true.

We... The animals aft, learned that when it came to 'games of chance' it was simpler to figure out what you could afford to lose... Take it out of your wallet and mail it to him. It saved you a helluva lot of time and the embarrassment of having your clock cleaned.

When Noel K. trimmed the boat, you could shoot pool on the deckplates. He was a manifold magician... He dealt in increments pumped to forward and after trim that were the equivalent of a humming bird parade. The man was a planesman's dream. In the old smokeboat navy, you operated the bow and stern planes by turning contraptions that looked like stagecoach wheels... With most diving officers, you spent four hours wrestling those oversize bastards and sweating up your dungaree shirt.

When Noel K. had the dive, he would compensate the boat to a point where you could maintain a zero bubble by blowing on the operating gear every fifteen minutes. He was good... Damn good.

We entertained each other by telling Schilling stories. They could be total bullshit, but every lad aboard knew he was capable of doing everything that was told about him. He was one of those 'larger than life' characters that bluejacket's barroom legends are built around. The man was one helluva submarine sailor.

There was a downside to being an animal on a boat with Schilling in the wardroom. The sonuvabitch always knew what you were up to before you had actually figured it out yourself. He could abort a stupid stunt still forming in the womb of mental deviousness... And a little voice in your head would say to you,

"Only some sonuvabitch who had successfully pulled off what you were going to do, would recognize the indicators."

The animals loved him... No erosion of respect. He commanded respect in the same way a master safe cracker would respect a guy who had picked the lock on Queen Elisabeth's chastity belt with a bluebird feather. He was good. Sailors always feel most secure when watching a master pulling rabbits out of weird hats.

I pity the guys who rode boats with lousy wardrooms... Musta been hell. Requin was a good boat forward and aft... Sure, we didn't ride a sea-going Sunday school... The wardroom was called upon to set us on fire on a regular basis... And we operated well beyond the limits of hormonal constraint... But it worked. Nothing hit the fan that we couldn't get out of... Or blame on some other boat.

Noel K. took time to square a kid away. I was 19... He pounded electrical and trim and drain quals into my low-level brain, encased in a tank turret skull. Anyone who could install knowledge between my ears was perfectly capable of teaching fleas to waltz.

I collected memories... Didn't know it at the time. At nineteen, next month was as far in the future as I gave a damn about. I was never growing old... My dad had the market cornered on that nonsense. No sir, I was going to master the panty elastic combination, keep the breweries working an extra shift and own the world someday... At 19, all of that seems possible... Old age was bullshit.

When it arrives, it is still major bullshit, but it is made much easier if you collected your seabag full of memories when you said,

"Screw the future... When's liberty?"

At 19, pissing against the tide is a full time job... And it helps to have a LT Noel K. Schilling there to toss you a heavie when it gets over your head.

Noel K. Schilling and James A. Buckner... Aces back to back... USS Requin (SS-481).

Saint Thelma by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Gentlemen... Do I detect a note of jocularly at the expense of Saint Thelma... Patron Saint of Pier 22... Saint Thelma, who worked minor miracles from Bells Cathedral on Hampton Blvd... Bells Gospel Tabernacle of Brewed Products, Pickled Hardboiled Eggs, Beer Nuts, Pork Rinds and Speed of Light, Digital Stimulation?

Bells, that shrine to the memory of the lowest spectrum of the submarine community... The qualified single guy in search of amusement and gratification... Sort of like a watering hole on the plains of East Africa. When the sun went down, the animals showed up to quench their thirst and court the female of the species. In the daylight that followed the darkness, cross pollination partners often asked, "Jeezuz, how'n the hell did I end up with that?"

Saint Thelma, the goddess of barmaids... The lady who once announced that she would kill the next sonuvabitch who dropped a quarter in the juke box and punched "Don't Take Your Guns to Town". The lady who always made sure her regulars were poured into a taxi and delivered to the Orion pierhead watch in time to make morning quarters... And that mother substitute who would pick up your laundry if you had to single up and shove off at oh dark hundred to provide ping time for Naval aviators who couldn't find a Greyhound bus in a haystack.

Thelma... They should erect a statue... A bronze likeness in the middle of the entrance to DES SUB Piers with an inscription, "*The Queen of Naval Cold Warriors - Sweetheart of SUBRON Six.*"

And a second statue of Dixie out at Ocean View inscribed, "*World's Largest Set of Minor League Tits... Never Got Both of Them in the Same Zip Code.*"

The Moonbeam Navy by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I am, was, and shall ever be a Diesel Boat Sailor. It could properly be said that I am too stupid to be a nuclear powered qualified man... We'll never know, because the only way

you would get me on one of those sonuvabitches would take Chloroform and one helluva logging chain.

I went to sub school in '59. By that time, diesel boats had reached a stage where they were the Naval equivalent of a 95 year old call girl. They were failing and falling apart all over the place, and parts were no longer available. By cosmetics we kept the old girls going until the last snap of their garters... And we loved them.

Rickover was an arrogant little sonuvabitch. The little weasel promoted, condoned and perpetuated friction between the conventional boat service and his little 'Merry Moonbeam Navy'. Today, nuke boats have come and gone, just like their diesel counterparts. Only thing is, outside of some long-range cruise missile Valentines, the entire nuke navy hasn't seen the combat service of a single WW II Balao or Tench boat. A cruise missile is the equivalent in manly expression of calling up the middle weight champion of the world on long distance phone service, to tell him you put dog crap in his mailbox. Sorry, but 'Red' Ramage, Slade Cutter and George White would have been lousy cruise missile boat sailors... They punched your lights out without going beyond their own zip code... And came home with a cigar box full of combat medals - Not gedunk, no-risk patrol pins.

It seems to me somehow, a submarine was never meant to rival ships of the Norwegian cruise lines. Hey, I watch the Discovery Channel... For years, I wondered why the milk and eggs never spoiled... In fact, I once set the world record for securing bulkhead flappers when the cook popped a 'blue egg' on the grill! I said to myself, "How are those guys drinking milk on day 32 of one of them two month runs?" Simple. They carry cows... And chickens... In the after farm compartment. They probably trim ship by moving the herd.

We used to watch movies in the crew's mess. We elevated the projector on two Pyrex cereal bowls, and the screen was the size of the cover of Time magazine. On a good night, we could pack twenty guys in there. On a nuke boat, if you don't like the film, you can move to another theater, in another compartment... The only drawback being, if you come in late they make you sit in the balcony.

Nukes have beauty parlors, pool halls and Bingo night. The old oil burners had two or three decks of cards so damn dog-eared that guys in Maneuvering Room could figure out what hands were being dealt just by listening to the cards being shuffled over the XJA.

I know that living in close proximity to the reactor on a nuke boat will not shrink one's testicles... The Navy says it... Science says it... And William Jefferson Clinton will give you his word, and we all know how reliable that is. Still, they've never explained the voice change of the 'Buck Rodgers' fleet.

No, I don't want to ride any submarine named for characters appearing on past or present postage stamps, or negotiable currency, or any place found on a AAA TripTik.

At New London, we were taught submarines were named for fish and other denizens of the deep, not Al Gore and East Jeezus, Minnesota.

We had one crew - total accountability. When equipment screwed up, the old man knew exactly who to light up. It was not uncommon to see boat sailors with smoking hip pockets. There wasn't any of this 'Blue crew - Gold crew', 'He said - She said', bullshit either.

And another thing... The nuke boats paint big black dots all over their scope fairings... What the hell for? Camouflage??? Now, who's this gonna fool? A big contraption sticking up in the middle of the gahdam ocean with big black polka dots all over it. Do they actually think that somewhere on the globe there are folks stupid enough to collectively mistake that scope for a speckled trout?

I'm sure glad that I was fortunate enough to ride boats before Dorothy and the Wizard moved in...

Maybe we were the lads from the wrong side of the tracks. Maybe we did hot sack, drink coffee with oil slick rainbows floating in it, smelled like the bottom of an iguana cage, and lived on sea store smokes and dirty books. At least we weren't required to drop our skivvies every night and take caliper readings on our fixtures of manhood.

"Mother Onion" by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The submarine tender, USS Orion (AS-18) was a floating wonderland of repair shops, supply distribution points, stores, medical facilities, and entertainment. The boredom of constant in port duty had turned all the personnel assigned to quarterdeck watches into poor, wretched, sorry excuses for human beings and rendered them completely devoid of the ability to exercise common sense. When diesel boat sailors transited this hallowed area, comments like "scarecrow navy", "friggin bums", and "riff raff" were thrown around in an indiscriminate manner.

It was a helluva lot easier to use the lower brow - kinda like the tradesman's entrance. The only problem with this point of entry were creatures called master-at-arms and bos'n mates... Strange forms of primitive life that roamed around on surface ships, spreading ill will and evil attitude.

Proper nomenclature and use of officially condoned and authorized Naval terms was very important to these high hashmark, brain-dead idiots. It was their 'Mother's Milk'... They used pirate movie vocabulary...

"Avast matey, there be a vessel on the lew'ard quarter, arrrgh..."

If it was a slow day and you wanted to wind up the organ grinder's monkey for entertainment, all you had to do was say, "Hey, Doc..."

(They hated to be called "Doc", "Hoss", or "Mr. Sailorman...")

"Hey Doc... How'd I get to where the officers do all their officer stuff?"

"Crissakes son, how long you been in the Navy?"

"Not long, Hoss, how 'bout you?"

"Long enough to know you're one (blanking) hopeless mother (blanker)!"

This was funny because I wasn't the fool who was about to jump out of his brogans and have a heart attack.

"Yeah Doc, last time I was over on your big boat, I think your officers lived upstairs at the end of a big gray hall with a lot of doors, fire extinguishers, pipes and electrical wire, and stuff..."

This kind of Naval sacreligious talk could make all the veins stand out on the neck of any sonuvabitch with fouled anchors below his crow. And, if he went into one of those "In the OLD Navy..." routines, you had him. He would then throw terms at you like,

"Midships, th'wartships... 02 deck, up ladder, stb'd passageway, to the companionway aft of frame 32..."

Once they started tossing around that Charlie Tuna talk, their eyes lit up. For one fleeting moment suspended in time, this poor pitiful excuse for a human being became Popeye, Barnacle Bill and the kid off the Cracker Jack box, all rolled into one seafaring clown act.

"Thanks buddy, I like that neat Navy talk... You musta paid a lot of attention to all that Navy silly shit in bootcamp... I'll bet your mama's real proud of you..."

By this time, even a certifiable idiot would unravel your act.

Once you got into 'Mother Onion', there were endless forms of things to do, to amaze and entertain yourself.

Up off the boat deck was the radio shack. Radiomen have to go in and out of officer's country all the time, so they gotta be clean and neat. Radio shacks are the best places to steal white hats. Radiomen on the Orion never seemed to figure that out

You could always go down to the forward area where the 'T' Division bunked down. There was a good chance you could find some intellectually stimulating literature laying around... Magazines with articles like, "I was an American sailor trapped on an island inhabited by sex-crazed Amazon women." This kind of historically accurate recounting

of little details previously unknown, contributed to a rapid increase in one's Naval awareness.

I once walked into a sophisticated, highly technical, state-of-the-art photo lab on the Orion. I found two highly placed members of the Naval establishment using massive carbon arc lights to cook frozen pizzas. I left with a renewed faith and elevated confidence in the military preparedness of the Naval establishment - and two hot slices of pepperoni pizza.

There was a vicious rumor that non-rated men would go to the tender to dope off and waste time, endlessly screwing around to no particular purpose. Whenever some authority drunk keeper of the flame and all-Navy gatekeeper would come toward you with that "What in the hell are you doing here?" look in his eye... We would smile and launch a preemptive strike...

"Pardon me Chief, where are we supposed to go to donate the blood you guys called for, to help those Taiwanese typhoon victims?"...

Hell, sometimes the old bastards went for it like a #5 dry fly. Most of the time though, they played 'Pin the Tail on the Wiseass'.

They were always blowing whistles and passing, "Now hear this..." bulletins over their 21 MC.

"Now hear this... Orion arriving..."

"Now hear this... Orion departing..."

"Now hear this... Uniform of the day for all ship's company not engaged on work details... Undress blues..."

Sometimes we'd get so damn depressed, we'd have to go the radio shack and steal another white hat.

On Orion, there was a wierd cult of unsalvagable individuals known as postal clerks. Two occupations I never figured out - Orion postal clerks and people who raise nightcrawlers for live bait stores. Can you imagine a 30 year career sorting and bagging mail?

I once walked through a heavy machine shop. They had equipment there fully capable of turning out a prop shaft for the biggest ship afloat... Six guys were busting their ass turning out two inch high monel metal chessmen. They had just completed what appeared to be five to six hundred rooks.

They had a ship's service and a geedunk that did a landslide business in steel belted hot dogs and stale potato chips. Hell, you could buy monogrammed lighters, pen sets,

brooches, pendants, even little 'USN' dangly earrings - to use as 'pogey bait' for that honey with loose panty elastic... or maybe a sonargirl...

In those days, the Orion was in a life and death race with rust. Bos'n mates were still considered to be part of the human race, and the submarine force had degenerated to the point it was sending forth emissaries to steal, scavage and wholesale appropriate whatever was necessary to keep the petroleum-powered submersibles from taking up permanent residence in Davy Jones locker.

This was the point in Naval history where some enterprising genius discovered that if you cut the end out of a Trojan and rerolled it, you had a universal O-ring... And that you could waterproof your watch by dropping it into a Trojan and tying a knot in it. If you are saying to yourself, "Why in the hell would some sonuvabitch wanna do that?" You obviously never missed the last liberty boat and had to swim out to wherever your boat was swinging the hook. You could tell a frequent swimmer... He carried multiple rubbers and a laminated liberty card.

It was all too long ago in the land of DES SUB Piers.

Norfolk Yard by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Anyone pull an overhaul at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth? (If it was in Portsmouth Virginia, how come it wasn't the Portsmouth yard??) Anyway, going to the yard was a dope-off after battery rat's dream...

They billeted the single guys on a contraption called an APL - Auxillary Personnel Lighter... A floating barracks. It had multiple compartments with lockers and racks to accomodate around 1,200 sailors. We had about 30 unmarried, non shacked-up folks. It wasn't a tight fit. Some guys homesteaded a complete compartment. We were like 30 mice in the Waldorf-Astoria... And like mice, we collected stuff... Brought it back and stuffed it in our new home.

John Class got us two lounge chairs from the patio of the Chief's Club and one of those ashtray stands... Someone came back with a couple of broken metal chairs that we had a loafing welder fix. They weren't pretty, but they fit the average butt a helluva lot better than an orange crate. Max bought this little kids wading pool to fill with water and stretch out in. We even bought a pirate flag at some North Carolina tourist trap. Well, no one considered the cumulative effect... Visually, we created what must have ranked with the top ten eyesores of North America. We had zero taste. Our idea of first rate interior decorating ran along the lines of Sanford and Son.

Some guy, possibly the Deputy Prime Minister of the Navy Yard arrived in a shiny black car and called us everything but civilized human beings.

"Do you have ANY idea what kind of image this presents to civilians passing this facility in their boats?"

Actually, we had no idea, and knew at the rate we were progressing along the road of life, we most likely would NEVER have any idea. We DID have a rough idea about the asking price of a 200 foot yacht and figured on E-3 pay, sub pay, sea & foreign duty pay, winning a couple of anchor pools and being damn lucky at cards, we could probably buy one outright if we lived to be 406 years old... Make that 380 if we made Chief.

We had to remove all the superfluous crap. Well, we did... We moved it all inside and created the 'Grand Salon'.

We watched movies in this rat trap. We had an ANQB Navy 16mm projector for films we would draw from the Navy Motion Picture Exchange. Hey, anyone remember that fat ankle second class Amazon lesbian who worked in the Motion Picture Exchange? From whose dainty feminine lips would come...

"Alright you _____ suckers... No form, no film. Got that, you idiot bastards? NO FORM, NO FILM!"

It was sad. We always referred to her in the politest of terms...

One night, I got on the watch bill as the duty MPO... Motion Picture Operator. MPO was the biggest racketeer slot in the entire Navy. It ranked right up there with being a Hollywood gynecologist.

They sent you to two days of Motion Picture Operator's School to learn what you could teach a trained gerbil in about 5 minutes. In two days you graduated and they gave you the coveted "Qualified Motion Picture Operator" card.

This was like having your sentence commuted if you were a winter topside watch. While the poor sonuvabitch standing topside watch was doing his damndest to keep ice cubes from forming in his arteries, the duty MPO was parked on his worthless butt in the warm corner of the messdeck... Watching kissy-face movies, eating popcorn and yelling at the below decks watch every time he passed in front of the screen. It never got any better than that... In the pecking order of God's creatures, duty MPO ranked right up there with fleas who found a warm place on a collie he couldn't reach with his hind leg.

One night on the APL, some genius turned up with what had to have won the Skin Flick Oscar of 1961. An hour and 15 minutes of ugly people doing things only acrobats and the criminally depraved could appreciate...

As for me, I have absolutely no good taste. I can handle just about anything that doesn't involve kids or exploit girls below the age of consent. But this thing was so tasteless, I watched 5 to 10 minutes, then hit the rack. The dialog was Italian... That figures... It was

picked up in the Med. After I hit the rack, there was a second showing and guys from two New London boats being overhauled showed up.

About ten the next day, two gentlemen from the Office of Naval Intelligence showed up. They were looking for the duty MPO.

"Was a pornographic film shown on board this ship last night?"

"Yes sir... Sort of an instructional film."

"A film involving nudity and blatant sexual activity?"

"Aye sir..."

"And you showed the film?"

"No sir."

"If you didn't show the film and you were the assigned MPO, who did?"

"Sir, I'm boat service... We live by taking care of each other. I'm not going to lie... You'll have to be satisfied with my word that it wasn't me."

Well, the two Dick Tracy ONI guys grilled the entire duty section, the cooks and the duty officer. These INTELLIGENCE officers never figured out that

(A.) The Navy projector was a 16mm projector...

(B.) The Italian basement production was an 8mm home movie...

(C.) It had to be shown on a 'brought from home' projector.

At morning quarters the following day, the exec announced that we would not like the strange and exotic things he was prepared to do to the entire crew if ever another porno film was brought on board.

"Gentlemen, am I fully understood?"

"Yes sir..." (Old guys said "Aye sir..." When you started saying "Aye" to everything, you were well on your way to becoming a lifer. Lifers were people who said "...In the OLD Navy..." a lot).

When officers ended a ten minute tirade on stuff that they wanted to come to "All stop", they always said, "Gentlemen, am I fully understood?" What this translated to in deck force language was... "I hope you stupid sonuvabitches... You thick skull, out-of-control, worthless idiots... Paid attention to my well choreographed song and dance, because if

you repeat that conduct I will nail your dog tags to a line locker lid and dive the boat." I became a real master linguist when it came to translating officer talk.

Things like "Mind your helm" meant "Holy jumpin' jeezus, snake wake!!", and "Sailor, where did you stow those blues?" translated to "Did you jam those gahdam things in a side locker and forget that man had developed the electric steam iron?"

Everything in the yard cost a 20 lb. can of coffee. That was the basic exchange rate. Hell, you could get a destroyer chrome plated if you had enough cans of coffee and crab meat... Strange places, Navy yards...

They also frown on the game where members of the undersea forces see how many Shop 72 yellow helmets they can toss into a tin can stack sitting upright in the drydock... And shooting welding rods out of CO2 extinguishers. We invented the 'Helmet Down the Stack' game... It had very promising prospects for the '64 Olympics in Tokyo.

When you leave the yard, the CO usually panics... You see, when you arrive, he signs for three prong knuckle busters, pneumatic rotary scalers, helmets, gloves, fire extinguishers, 20 miles of 40 ft. section non-collapsible air hose, and a whole bunch of other highly portable expensive junk... The Old Man was accountable...

When we collected all the crap before leaving, we were a couple short of damn near everything. The skipper explained that he had no desire to spend the next hundred and fifty years of his life at Portsmouth Naval Prison and would appreciate it if enterprising young lads would go forth and locate our stray inventory.

In an hour, we were flush. We outdid Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves... While I occupied the attention of some yardbird with a giant air operated piece of equipment, Adrian Stuke disconnected 3 sections of non collapsible hose, rolled it up, tied it to a line, and watched it disappear up the side of the dry dock. My last memory of this incident was that of watching a disbelieving yardbird clicking the trigger on this thing he was working with and saying to himself, "The sonuvabitch was okay a minute ago..."

When we left, we had to clean up the APL... It looked like a handgrenade test range. If you were never a diesel boat sailor in the yard, you missed one of the all-time great experiences in life.

The bullshit you put up with, the crap you went through for 4" of pin back sterling silver was all worth it for one Tarzan two months trip to the yard.

Snapshots by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

After damn near forty years, there are still people walking around that I swore to locate and feed to the alligators.

#1 - The clowns who smoked sea store Marlboros and poked the dead butts up in the empty tube of the operating vent handles. Every time we had a 'Hand Dive'... Shifted the pin and pulled the vent handle, what appeared to be 500 Marlboro butts fell out and rained down all over the gahdam deck.

#2 - Guys who ate hard boiled eggs and drank beer in Bells, then returned to the boat, crawled into an after battery rack and released lethal gas emissions that should have been banned by the Geneva Convention.

- 3 Bastards in the stores loading party who used electricians knives to cut the lower right hand corner out of the Post assorted cereal boxes and steal all the Grape Nuts, Frosted Flakes and Sugar Crisp boxes... (Lower right hand corner? How'd I know that?)

- 4 The guys who, when we had to stack canned goods by the case in the passageways, put the gahdam canned beans and peas on the bottom. If you ever had to pull up 50 cases of cans to play the "Where the Hell are the damn beans" game, in a dark compartment, in a state three sea, you would understand.

- 5 The same goes for any clown who stored coffee in 20 lb. cans outboard an engine, then piled gahdam canned goods in front of it. Those folks deserve a special place in Hell.

- 6 Any sonuvabitch who told a lie in an "At Sea" movie swap. By no stretch of the imagination can Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs be confused with The Magnificent Seven. For years I prayed that the lying bastards on the USS English (DD 696) would hit a gahdam iceberg and go straight to Hell. We gave up War and Peace, Peyton Place, Splendor in the Grass, and six episodes of Rawhide to close that deal. In the all-time annals of con jobs, that took the nickle plated prize. May they spend eternity conducting man overboard drills and cleaning bilge strainers.

- 7 The supply officer on the Turkish tin can who gave us the gahdam blankets. In that little gift of international goodwill, we acquired half of the crabs in the known world and spent a month in the North Atlantic going around saying, "I'll trade you two blind ones for one with no teeth..."

- 8 The idiot who stole the bullet out of the topside watches 45 magazine. Nobody counted bullets... Hell, once the brass turned green, who cared? We just took the stuff, wrote "Relieved the watch - Received one 45 cal. pistol and 16 rounds of 45 cal. ball ammo" in the log. Nobody ever figured out there were only 15 rounds until some Chief checked. You have no idea how much commotion one bullet can cause... Never say to a surface craft Chief, "Here's a buck, go by yourself another bullet and be a nice fellow." Hell, most of the time we used the magazine holder to hide Clark bars.

- 9 Whoever told the COB that the deck force were tossing paint scrapers and chipping hammers over the side... We preferred to call it 'float testing'. Every band of merry men had a Judas.

- 10 The idiot Marine on the gate at the Charleston Yard who discovered an issue canned ham in our vehicle... And used terms like "Misappropriation of Naval issue." This handmaiden of Montezuma had difficulty understanding that geographical location of consumption was not perscribed as long as we ate the damn thing... It was sustaining members of the United States Navy and would pass through the same digestive systems with the same ultimate result, whether we ate it on the boat or at the beach. He let us go... Which was fortunate because the trunk was loaded with the rest of our luau.

- 11 The Chinese lady who operated that green laundry truck on the pier head road, with her husband who never had seen a dentist or a comb... "Hop-Sing, the Button Crusher." There was no front bumper so Hop-Sing glued his base sticker square in the middle of his front windshield. What a pair. He had a sign that read, "NO PICK UP LAUNDRY ONE MONTH LOOK FOR IN ORION LUCKY BAG." You would stand in line for 20 minutes then go to hand Mrs. toothless Hop-Sing your bag of laundry...

"No take... No take... Boat go to sea... No take..."

The old witch had Squadron Six ops wired. She knew everything. Shit, they talk about the Chinese spying... There was so much info coming out of that laundry truck, Hop-Sing could have briefed the Joint Chiefs. All scuttlebutt was not official until it cleared the laundry truck.

- 12 John F. Kennedy... When he got elected, he came up with a brilliant idea to test the physical condition of the entire Armed Forces... They were called "JFK's." A bunch of hootn' nanny, 4th. of July potato sack-like events with lots of running, hopping, skipping, jumping stuff. A smorgesboard of idiot delights. Guys ran up and down yelling, "Hey Chief, I don't have to do this... It ain't on my qual card." and "I voted for Nixon." The only test E-6 and above had to do, dealt with lifting beer pitchers at the Chief's Club.

- 13 Anyone who wanted to see Old Yeller for the 200th. time at sea.

- 14 The guy on the geedunk truck who would not accept 300 Pesetas for a hamburger and fries, even after we explained that at the going rate in Palma, you could get drunk, laid, and a shoeshine for that.

- 15 Ray Stone, the lousy sonuvabitch, who is continually contributing to the delinquency of a senior citizen... And has my bride of thirty-five years worried about law suits, deportation and men arriving with nets to haul me away.

For those of you who have never met Ray Stone, he is an "At Large" lunatic, former Mayor of Bells, and unrepentant, unreconstructed smoke boat sailor, whose reputation places him beyond redemption. He has plumbed the depths and lower reaches of the GDU of life, and has assembled a band of like-minded, unsalvagable bastards to whom

he brings back the laughs and memories of yesteryear. Unfortunately, there are too damn few of these characters left...

"There's air in the banks, shit in the tanks and water all around..."

So, waddya do? *"BLOW BOW BOUYANCY!!!"*

War cry SUBRON 6, 1960

A Thank You Note to Ron's BBS by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Looter's Terrace... Star Terrace... Little Italy... The Big "O"... The Victory... Bells... Lovey's Krazy Kat... The Jolly Roger and the George Washington Bar (Dixie & Tiger), just outside the main gate of Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth.

The Gospel Tabernacle bus that picked up non rated kids who had acquired a snoot full and were 'carrying a package'... They hauled you off to some gahdam circus tent God knows where, tossed hot coffee into you, made you sing, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus", gave you a sermon on the evils of the dissipated life, then carted you off to DES SUB piers.

You always knew that you had your worthless, drunken soul rehabilitated when you woke up the next day, still in your blues and shoes, your mouth tasting like the bottom of a bird cage, and you find a card in your jumper pocket that reads, "SATAN OFTEN DECIEVES BUT JESUS SAVES."

It was great to be young and diesel qualified.

I would like to thank the folks who have been so kind with the reactions and comments on Ron Martini's Submarine BBS. There aren't a whole helluva lot of us left. It's like speaking the language spoken in the Fiji Islands... Who in the hell do you talk to? There are probably more people that remember 78 records, Ipana toothpaste and Old Gold cigarettes, then remember us. Nowadays, America has an attention span of ten minutes. What we did in the old gravel gut diesel boat service has long been forgotten.

We are like the rascals in Jurassic Park... Big, old worn out sonuvabitches, long ago forgotten. They tore down our bars... All the bar maids we loved are now wearing Depends and support stockings, and the raghats riding deep submergence iron today are whiz kids who talk quantum physics and super attenuated focal direction, instead of hot cars and plotting to get in some honey's pants.

Different world... Different time... Different Navy.

Things They Don't Tell You at New London

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

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 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.

Heavy Weather by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

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 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 Stukey 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.

Channel Fever by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

FINEX... "Finished Exercise..." The two most beautiful words in a submariner's vocabulary. This announcement is usually followed by a course change for port... Makin' turns for home.

Grown men went nuts... The Old Man opens the showers... Thirty second soapdown, thirty second rinse... Foo foo juice. Foo foo is hair tonic, after shave lotion, cologne, sometimes all together. Stuff like Lucky Tiger, Mennins, Old Spice... Good smelling stuff... In an hour after they turned on the white lights in the after battery, half the boat smelled like a New Orleans cathouse.

Guys went around punching each other in the shoulder and saying,

"Hey bucko, watcha wanna do when we get in?"

"Think Bells will be open?"

"Wonder if Daisy could scare somethin' up for your ole' buddy?"

"Jeezuz, look at this place! Let's turn to and square it away before the COB shows up and we have to listen to his 'No self-respecting pig...' speech and his discourse on our personal living habits... Hygene... In the Old Navy... You know, all that horsecrap."

"Anyone got an extra set of dolphins? Pinned mine on some chippy in Halifax..."

"Who stole my gahdam shoe brush?"

"Any of you guys want to stand-by and take the charge for a grateful shipmate who missed his kids first two peewee ball games?"

(Nobody ever paid for stand-bys on the boat... A Requin thing...)

"Hey, anyone going to Philly?"

"Anyone seen my shoe?"

"Which watch section has the duty?"

"Who's duty cook?"

"Stukey, where in the hell did you come up with that clean set of whites?"

(Adrian Stukey was a sailor you could bury twelve feet down in a manure pile and he would emerge looking like he walked right out of a recruiting poster. He had clean whites no matter where you were... A 4.0 sailor in a 2.0 world.)

"Anyone wanna get up a poker game in the after room?"

"Anyone wanna see 'Sea Wife' for the 30th. time?"

"Hey Doc, what's this stuff growin' between Jack's toes?"

"Anyone got smokes?"

"Where's that 'Swamp Girl' paperback?"

"Hey, you guys remember that wierd smell we had over here in the passageway last week? Well, you guys owe Peto an apology... Had nothing to do with his socks... I just found some kind of semi-decomposed seafood shell in the waterway. Blame whoever passed the 'one-way' up the after battery hatch."

"What the hell... Peto's got feet that smell like a dead mummy wrapper..."

"Screw you Mr. 'Smell like a Rose,' if it wasn't for a half gallon of Old Spice, you'd smell like the inside of Yugoslavian gym shorts."

"What's our ETA?"

"When's the Old Man gonna set the maneuvering watch?"

"I'm gonna kill any worthless sonuvabitch from Orion that tries to sneak off with a heaving line... Little bastards."

"That reminds me, we gotta replace number one line... Getting a little raggedy."

"Anyone know who had the topside T-wrench last... Can't you gahdam idiots remember to put stuff back where you got it? Didn't they teach you anything in Kindergarten?"

"Hey Jack, look in the T-wrench locker under 'T'..."

"Hey, remember what the skipper said about no nekkit lady pictures taped up when lady visitors may be coming through."

"That nekkit lady is my future bride..."

"The only way that nekkit lady is ever going to hear about you, you ugly sonuvabitch, is if the boat sinks and she reads your name in the paper... I can see it now... SUBMARINE REQUIN LOST... NUMBERED AMONG THE CREW, FRANK DAVENPORT, UGLIEST SAILOR ON THE EAST COAST."

"Keep it up horsefly, and uncle Frank may pop you in the snot locker."

"We love you Frank, honest we do... But either take that gahdam picture down or go find something and draw some clothes on her."

"Honest to God... Not more than five minutes ago, I laid my damn comb in the middle of my rack... It's gone... Sonuvabitch just grew legs and walked off..."

"Aw, shut the hell up Charlie, nobody likes to hear a shortimer whine."

"How's your mother?"

"Allright children, let's not start the 'how's your mother' crap."

"Get this, the cook's making sorry-ass grilled cheese sandwiches and the COB is letting the lazy bastard get away with it... When we all die of Velveeta poisoning, I hope the CNO eats him alive."

"Hey, the cook doesn't want to have to clean up a big mess when we get in... Has a new baby."

"Yeh? Well, any lazy bastard who would serve his crew lousy cheese sandwiches heading in, probably used a yardbird for the conception."

"Naw, word has it the snipes off the 'Cubby Bear' do the job for two cheese sandwiches and a jug of 'Fox...'"

"Knock it off, ladies!"

Channel fever... Endless inane conversation... Wierd smelling air... The cementing of friendships that would last 'til they all crawled into the 'No Deposit, No Return' box and applied for the six foot plot in the Federal Sailors Farm. Good men... Good boat... Strong coffee... Lousy conversation... Silver dolphins. Wouldn't have missed it for all the money in the world.

They Painted Them Over by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

You will have to excuse this one. Most of my generation was raised on John Wayne, George Patton, Red Ryder & Little Beaver. The blood of the men who crushed two and a half nations full of self-possessed supermen, still pumped through our chest IMO

pumps. I grew up in an age and location where boys were expected to look up little girls dresses on the swings and settle differences of opinion on the playground at lunch.

We didn't have Mr. Rogers, Big Bird and simpering Barney. Thank God! We weren't confused that we came with male fixtures but were being taught to think by folks of doubtful gender or lady gear. No one called anyone a "wussy", 'cause the only wussy thinking was being expended on the creation of Richard Simmons. Right now you are probably saying, "Dex... What in the hell does this soapbox tap dance have to do with smoke boats?"

In the late fifties, Naval leadership caught a case of mass amnesia or a stiff case of collective stupidity... They completely forgot about Pearl Harbor. In ten years, the sonuvabitches who brought you the attack on Pearl, the Bataan death march, the rape of Nanking, the bridge over the river Kwai, the wanton destruction of the Philippines, kamikaze planes, and were only stopped by the nuclear Orkin man, suddenly became our "Soapy Shower" pals... Same sonuvabitches... New smile. We hadn't invented the term "spin doctors" yet, but all farm boys could recognize a manure spreader.

I don't want to get in a "The Japanese are nice people" hoo-hah... I'm sure they are. But from 1936 until two A-bombs triggered their religious conversion, they were an ornery bunch of bastards.

A lot of guys in the undersea services were called upon to put damn near all of their seagoing hardware on the bottom of the Pacific, along with any citizens of Nippon who happened to have their fannies parked in these ships. A lot of Japanese sucked a lot of saltwater, thanks to a generation of boat sailors who will always be my heroes. They put the pride and meaning in the silver dolphins we wore.

When these magnificent bastards sent another load of Japanese sons of Hirohito off to hell, they would paint a Jap flag on the conning tower fairwater. That was the prize in the bottom of the Cracker Jack box... A nine inch by six inch flag painted where it would announce to the world that the folks who sunk the fleet at Pearl had made another installment payment. The American people had selected the sub force to be their collection agent and if you could turn a blind eye to being shot at, depth charged and bombed, business was good. If the visible "Jap flag" accounting tallies on the sides of conning towers was any indication... Very good.

I saw grown men... Wonderful representations of the best we turn out in this great country... Saw these men cry when the boats they rode were towed off to the scrap yard. One of my most wonderful memories of the sub force was one day I was returning to base at New London... You know, haulin' hiney down that windy road that ran along the river. I came over a hill and there was an old first class gunners' mate standing there in dress canvas... He had his dolphins sewn above the cuff of his right sleeve, was wearing all his medals and saluting an old, rusty, cannibalized fleet boat being towed upriver by the razorblade pirates. The old bastard had parked his cane against an oak tree... He just stood there... For me, that moment will last a lifetime. It was this old

gunner, the boat, memories of tough times, great shipmates, and watching that old rusty girl down there heading for her last date, that says it all.

In the late fifties, the leadership in a fit of mass memory obliteration said,

"Let us not continue to offend and embarrass our oriental brethren and paint over these offensive eyesores donning the conning towers..."

And we did.

Who knows, we may have witnessed the birth of political correctness.

What we should have said was,

"Japanese sailor, look at this submarine's conning tower... Then thank whoever it is you pray to that we didn't get your old man, or you wouldn't be here, to get upset."

Most subsurface lads today never had to paint over Jap flags... But it can't hurt to, every once in a while, stop and reflect on our bubblehead brethren who put them there. So the next time you pray to the Almighty, you can thank your God that he let you miss that workin' party.

Small Ships by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

We rode small ships. We knew everyone on board. We knew their hometowns, their girls, the type books they read, what beer they drank, what they smoked, and who had five bucks two days before the Navy paid us. It is hard for me to understand what it must have been like to ride a carrier. It would seem to me to be like living in New York City... No way you could know everyone... I would think you would get lost in the mob. The berthing compartments must be like suburbs.

Nope, the smoke boat dungaree navy was tight... We lived in each other's hip pockets. It was so damn tight at times that you had to go topside to realize there was a big world beyond the pressure hull.

I got lost on a carrier once. Got so damn lost I started to wonder if my enlistment would run out before I got to where I was supposed to be. They sent me over to deliver our DRT tracings to the CIC on the Valley Forge.

I finally found some first class airdale something or other, confessed that I was one lost sonuvabitch and he provided me with an E-3 seeing eye dog who got me to the CIC. When I got there, I had to sign this logbook. I wrote: "Armstrong, R.D. TM3(ss) USS Requin (SS-481)... Delivering DRT Tracings as ordered."

"What's a TM?"

"Toymakers Mate Third."

"A What?"

"Can't go into it..."

"What's 'SS'?"

"Special sailor... Make really good toys."

"You're a wise ass."

"I've been told that... And you don't know shit about working rates. If you guys could find a rubber duck in a bathtub, I wouldn't be here."

We exchanged a few more pleasantries and they led me into a compartment that had more electrical gedunk whizzbang stuff than I had ever seen. They had every piece of hokey crap any government had hawked to the Navy since Noah... All of it connected by six million miles of coax.

I remember standing there like a tourist in Frankenstein's castle and thinking to myself, "These guys are wading knee deep in electronic Buck Rogers gear and the sonuvabitches can't find an old tired-ass diesel boat with scrapyard pencilled on her dance card... We're in trouble, Bucko... These clowns couldn't find a June bug with a string tied to its leg." They had officers in there that were standing on top of each other. Hell, if they had put diving masks on half the surplus officers in there and tossed 'em over the side to look for us, they would probably have pinned the tail on our donkey.

The only other thing I can remember is that I used to have the seamstress at Bells take my iron-on dungaree crows, iron them on blue flannel, cut them out and double stitch them on my shirts with the top open so I would have a pocket for smokes. This fashion statement attracted the attention of this Twinkie-brain Master at Arms... A five hundred hashmark E-6 built like Godzilla. He raked me over the coals in a ten-minute tirade where it became obvious that "personal eccentricity" and "whimsical appearance" were new terms he wanted to try out... It also became obvious that his theatrical performance was geared to his little, timid, intimidated, fondling, non-rated worshippers. I told him I was a boat sailor and uniform regulation rarely visited our quarterdeck. He wrote me up and I shoved off.

A month later, Obrian the yeoman grabbed me as I was going through the forward battery.

"Dex, what's this all about?"

He handed me a report chit... It read like a Dick and Jane "See Spot Run" book. My favorite line was, "This sailor needs a lesson in naval courtesy." Well, I certainly did. Obrian laughed and tossed it in his shitcan. He smiled and said,

"We sure can't send you on anymore good will trips to the big city, hayseed..."

I loved the boats... Wiser men than we were had boiled all the horse manure out of sea service and concentrated on first rate operating skills. Our leading POs gave us pride in doing good work... Being good at what we did. We worked at things like knocking seconds off our dives... Effecting fast reloads... Maintaining depth so you could build a house of cards on a messdeck table... Giving the old man fish that ran 'hot, straight and normal'... And doing our dead level best to give the old man a white "E" to paint on the sail.

We were a squadron full of wise asses. There was nothing more fun than exchanging verbal harpoons... Sinking one in a shipmate and snapping it off at the shaft. It was known as "Breaking one off." At chow you would hear, "Man, did Stuke bust one off in Dex..." It made life worth living. If you never rode the boats, that will make absolutely no sense to you... If you did, you know what I mean. The fun of 'breaking one off' in a guy in ship's company was never understood by the uninitiated.

We had our first reunion in 1993. My wife and I helped out at the registration desk. Shipmates would get out of cabs and their cars and yell,

"Dex, you worthless sonuvabitch! You're a sight for sore eyes..."

"Armstrong, you idiot... Figured someone would have locked you up long ago..."

"Hey bucko, you look like you spent a lot of years going through the chow line twice."

My little bride didn't know that she was witnessing the diesel boat equivalent of exchanging Hallmark cards.

Even my skipper told her that he couldn't understand how such a lovely girl could spend thirty plus years with the duty screwball. The sincerity of his firm handshake and pat on the back was the finest gift I got that year.

The best compliment came the next morning. Stuke, our wives and I were having breakfast in the coffee shop... The exec came in with his wife and spotted us. He looked at us and said,

"Stuke and Armstrong... I want my money back!"

We hollered back, "Don't worry sir, we've got the helm."

"Sure scares hell out of me..."

Good men... Good memories.

For years, I had no one to talk to who would have any idea of what we did or why we were like we were... Our weird humor and how great our shipmates were. Rontini and Stone have given us an opportunity to touch it all again. My gratitude is impossible to express. Thanks doesn't cover it... But it's the best I can muster.

An old boat sailor sent me an e-mail... Never had the honor to serve with this gentleman... He calls himself 'Old Gringo'... Well, he sent me the kind of message you fold up and put under your pillow... It was undeserved and far too laudatory, but to have your credentials as a boat sailor validated by a submariner of such caliber was better than a weekend with Gina Lola-whatever... I found his website... Old Gringo was, and still is, one of those old smoke boat bluejackets who made silver dolphins one of the finest insignias a man can wear. To have Old Gringo buy you an e-mail beer was heavy duty juju. Thanks Old Gringo... Wherever in the hell you are chasing lizards in Baja... Men like you made it possible for idiots like me to know how to do it. I just hope you have a grandson running around somewhere who knows he has saltwater and bunker oil in his blood chemistry... And that you leave him that dolphin patch they gave you in the 30s. Keep a zero bubble and thanks again.

Small ships produced a helluva lot of good men.

Rust Never Sleeps by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Like they say in detective stories, "The criminal always returns to the scene of the crime..." I visit those display boats that have gone to the Naval Taxidermy Shop, gotten the bunk and battery hysterectomy and big, gaping "ENTER HERE" and "GET THE HELL OUT HERE" holes cut out for a public sheep-dip process. The process relieves citizens of bucks and allows them to be herded through a gutted smoke boat like cans of Green Giant peas on a conveyer belt. At various locations, people whose knowledge of submarine operations was obtained at a local movie house or paperback books, regale the passing mob with information right out of Mother Goose. For three bucks, you get pixie dust and horse shit.

I return for the smell... It never leaves, and to get my 59 year old memory kick-started. I return because of a more than 40-year-old love affair with the old gals. I return for the same reasons all old boat sailors do... To revalidate my dolphins and show off for my pretty blue-eyed Norwegian wife.

The old girls are always kept immaculate when it comes to external appearance. To lure the public, they paint 'em up, buff 'em up, simonize 'em and doll 'em up like a Venus Flytrap. (In Baltimore, they painted ridiculous shark teeth on the bow... Some idiot whose mommy bought him the Little Golden Book of Flying Tigers, confused a smoke boat with a P-40... Just another example of what happens when you hand naval hardware to the incompetent idiots who never rode them.)

The outside looks crackerjack but 'beauty is only skin-deep.' An old Chief once told me the one thing you had to remember about submarines is that "Rust never sleeps..." Once you get past the cosmetics, damn near every boat has four or five inches of superstructure rust flakes on the pressure hull below the walking deck. The same folks who think ferocious shark teeth improve the appearance of a sub are the same clowns who think if the public can't see oxidation's equivalent of widespread cancer, it doesn't exist.

I visited a boat that looked like it was just launched... To the unknowing, she was a doll baby... But there was a hole six feet above the free flooding limber holes on the bow buoyancy tank that you could see daylight through. I'm no Dick Tracy, but that would tell me there had to be a set of corresponding holes on each side of the tank... And the tank walls couldn't stop a high velocity lightning bug.

Like most good women, the boats are high maintenance creatures. When you get married, you not only expect both lipstick and pap smear expense, but if you start neglecting stuff you can't see, the next thing you know you are tap-dancing with the devil.

Ray Stone, RamJet, Doc and several other highly dedicated "above and beyond the call folks" are busting their collective butts making sick submarines well... Sort of like 'Fleetboat Florence Nightingales' who travel miles for the weekend privilege of doing work every bluejacket did his best to duck. Old men in need of Geritol, Jim Beam and Viagra, screwing around with cutting torches and skill saws doing work the lazy-ass municipal bloodsuckers who pocket the tourist bucks should not have deferred. The caretakers who promised the Navy to exercise responsible stewardship of these fine ships, paint clown teeth on them... Turn them into caricatures from Terry and the Pirates and consign them to death by rust.

What's the first thing you tell an 8 yr. old kid that wants a puppy?

"It's YOUR puppy. If you don't care for it, it will starve, get sick and die..."

Eight year olds don't have a bunch of old coots with seaweed fouled around their tallywackers and bunker oil pumping through their primary system to bail out their worthless butts when Fido gets worms and ticks. Any city who takes a boat, milks it for all its worth and lays three quarter inch plywood down as large sections of the walking deck caves in, should be required to post a sign reading,

"VISIT THE U.S.S WHATZERNAME AND CONTRIBUTE YOUR MOOLAH TO VIEW ACCELERATING DETERIORATION DO WHAT THE NATION'S ENEMIES FAILED TO DO - END THIS BOAT'S EXISTANCE"

No, in the true American tradition, responsible adults... The kind of men who stop and give a hand at auto wrecks... The kind who donate blood regularly... The kind who take the neighborhood elderly shopping... The kind who find the time to be PTA board

members... Little League coaches... Scoutmasters and Vestrymen. The men we were proud to call shipmate and who made up the ship's company on some of the best boats God, E.B., Portsmouth, and Manitowoc ever made. These marvelous bastards, the Navy's equivalent of Jack with Magic Beans, will show up and bail out their worthless, good-for-nothing hineys.

Kinda makes you proud to be associated with that generation of boat sailors.

None of this of course applies to Ray Stone who is, as we all know, a misguided deviant, who's addicted to cutting torch smoke, sawdust and lousy coffee... The kind of unrepentant pervert who goes to HOOTERS just to see what's new in athletic socks and tennis shoes.

The After Battery Rat may be dumber than a box of Post Toasties but he can still recognize damn fine men when he sees 'em. .

Cowboy Cooking by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Thanks Cowboy. Your post is posted in a scrap book my wife is putting together. Ray Stone and I met about a year ago. I had visited a local hardware store and was wearing a ballcap I had picked up at a boat reunion. Some fellow asked if I was a submariner.. I told him that I rode The Boats a long time ago...Then he said "Do you know Ray Stone (Olgoat)?" That's like saying..."Oh, you're from Chicago...You know Bill Smith?" I had never heard of Ray Stone... If he fell out of a tree and landed on me, I wouldn't have known who he was... We exchanged cards and I forgot about the whole thing. I was living a quiet life in a quiet neighborhood where no one knew or gave a hoot in hell about submarines.

Ray made contact... Within hours we discovered we had chased the same gals, had an uncanny network of similar associations and a past propensity to engage in conduct qualifying us for membership in the lunatic fringe.

He told me about this magic wonderland called Rontini's BBS and his 'treehouse', The Stone's Scurvy Skivvy Sack. It was Ray Stone who introduced me to this wonderful magic slate that Rontini has so generously provided... and it was Ray who talked me into what has been a magic carpet ride.

The posts on Rontini's not only fuel this lunacy but knock the cobwebs off long forgotten incidents that I have tried to daisy chain into a romp through youthful indiscretion with the finest men I ever had the honor to associate with... and that includes Doc, the Harrisons, Old Gringo, Cowboy, RamJet, my old shipmate Hemming, and all the others whose toleration and acceptance has come to be one of the finest presents an old worn-out sonuvabitch can find on his doorstep. I keep wondering when the day will come... And it will arrive, when someone posts... "Someone shoot the bastard and make him pipe down."

Cowboy, I'm me... I'm not that fat, overindulgent fellow someone posted a photo of... I am a 155 lb. nonrated qualified idiot who lives in that worn out carcass and who appears like the genie out of the lamp for these stories. If Ray Stone quits buying beer and quits screwing with the lamp, I'll crawl back in and secure the horsecrap valve.

But as long as you old pasted together burnt out smoke boat sailors keep saying it's OK, I'll crank 'em out 'til the stupidity locker runs dry.

Cowboy... Did you ever eat Cowboy Meatloaf a la Requin? We had a cook called Stumpy or something like that. He and a sonarman named Jac Snider wore cowboy boots... Funny, the dumb stuff you remember. Stumpy and Snider were from New Mexico, where folks eat stuff so gahdam hot it oughtta be against the law.

We had been out doin' stuff that forced us into operating at ultra quiet. You remember, where the old man passed the word to "Rig for ultra quiet... Secure air conditioning and refrigeration..." You remember... It got hotter than the hubs of hell and you sat on the potato lockers in the crews mess in sweat-soaked dungaree shirts listening to your armpit hair grow, watching the reefer temperature gauge inch toward the point where the corpsman announced that all the contents therein was now condemned and had to go over the side.

At some mystical point the Navy had determined meat thawed out and rapid decomposition set in and good steak became rotten shark chow. Just prior to "rig for rot", Stumpy broke out three boxes of steaks and popped the metal bands. He handed out his collection of butcher knives and had us cutting the steaks in two inch wide strips. He couldn't use the powered meat grinder so he set up his hand-cranked grinder and began grinding steak. "Whatcha doin' cookie?" "Makin' Cowboy meatloaf." If I had had the ability to see into the future, I would have taken that knife and cut the sonuvabitches' throat... But like the rest of the clowns in the after battery, I kept cutting strips and passing it into the galley. Anyway, the closest I'd ever been to cowboys had all taken place at the local movie house.

Stumpy had a mason jar full of little white jelly bean size peppers. As he cranked, he kept tossing in a couple of these blasting cap peppers. When he had a pile of ground meat and peppers a couple of feet high, he added shredded up stale Wonderbread, some eggs and God knows what else. We just wandered around in the bliss of total ignorance while a cook who had direct links to the culinary arts of hell packed breadloaf pans and put them in the oven. Had I had any inkling of what that diabolical sonuvabitch was pulling out of that jar and tossing in that hand grinder, I would have broken all known speed records moving aft, would have clawed my way through the after trim tank and done my damndest to swim back to Norfolk.

Cowboy meatloaf and arc welding had the same mother. You can duplicate the sensation by sticking a flame-thrower down your throat and squeezing the trigger until fire shoots out your hip pockets or you can lick the manifold of an Indianapolis race car

during the victory lap. That stuff should not be circulated without a warning label reading,

"DO NOT EAT WITHOUT ASBESTOS SKIVVIES AND A MIDAS INSTALLED COLON."

We sat there eating that napalm loaf... Each of us afraid that if we didn't eat it, we would be a big sissy and catch a lot of crap from all the other idiots eating it for the same reason. Given a choice between another helping of Cowboy meatloaf and French kissing a lightning bolt, I would go for the latter hands down. If you have to eat that concoction to be a cowboy, I'm signing up to be a sheepman.

Cowboying scares the hell outta me... Cowboy, if I ever get to Reno, I'll take you up on the beer... But if you eat that mason jar pepper seasoned stuff, I'll just be passing through hoping to link up with a can of Spam.

Thanks again... As I say I'll read your post again in the morning for a dose of mental Viagra.

Norfolk Late Night Radio by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Anyone out there ever stand topside watch in Norfolk and listen to late night Norfolk Radio? I know you weren't supposed to do it, but everybody did. You were supposed to be informed...Weather and ball scores fell under some kind of informational category. Besides, in it's raw form, topside watch and mushroom farming have to rank side by side as man's most boring activity.

Every boat had one... Some idiot at the absolute lower end of the submarine social structure who would be given a white pistol belt and a side arm and be sent forth to see that in the dead of night, the Tooth Fairy didn't hijack your boat.

When you got tired of inspecting mooring lines, welcoming drunks and inventorying the pier 22 rat collection, you listened to Norfolk Late Night Radio. There was always some silly bastard out on Military Highway trying to sell you a used car for no down payment and thirty five cents a week for life... It was always a creampuff owned by some nun being transferred to Tibet.

Then there were naval tailors. "Old Bill" was the biggest marketeer on the late night airwaves. Old Bill was immediately prepared to put you in a set of doeskin blues for \$29.95 and if acted within 24 hours, Old Bill would toss in free alterations, rate patch and hashmarks. What Old Bill failed to tell you, but past experience had taught you , was that anyone operating a sewing machine at "Old Bill" smiled a lot and couldn't speak one gahdam word of anything remotely resembling the English language. All the people who did alterations at Norfolk's naval tailors came from remote third world countries where the indigenous male population had highly miniaturized crotch fixtures... And that in the post purchase phase of ownership of \$29.95 dress blues you

would spend a great deal of time attempting to relocate your testicles. This made a four to six hundred mile trip on a Greyhound bus an adventure not to be forgotten. It also added fun and excitement to a trip to the head after you were half in the bag.

The Jolly Roger Bar and Grill wanted you to drop in and meet your shipmates for good food and good times. it was a good time if you rode DDs or DEs... If you rode the boats, it was a good place to go for broken teeth and a date with the shore patrol.

Little Italy... A touch of Italy on Hampton Boulevard. If you were an E-3 drawing sub and foreign duty pay. Little Italy was a wonderful place to go if your folks owned a major railroad or you had just successfully robbed the Tidewater Savings and Loan and wanted to celebrate eating spaghetti and drinking a little vino. The table decorations included Chianti bottles with candles and ashtrays that read "Little Italy - Fine Italian Food."

When I mustered out and cleared the receiving-station at N.O.B., I said to myself,

"Horsefly, stay the hell out of Bells.. you'll get hammered and blow your dough"

Maturity was attempting to enter my life. I went to Little Italy. When they handed me the menu, I thought they were trying to sell me the place... You could buy a boxcar load of Franco American Spaghetti for the price of lunch.

Between hawking stuff to the sleeping fleet, Norfolk Radio dedicated songs...

"To Pete my handsome machinist third and all his buddies on the U.S.S. Tinkerbelle from your Agnes."

"To my little Marine. love you forever... Trixy."

"For Bubbles, from you-know-who"

"To all the boys in Liberty section Two, USS Doo-Dah, meet you at Cindy's Place... From Red Hot Mamma."

And there were songs in the night. Patti Page, Julie London, The Big Bopper, Theresa Brewer, Johnny Cash, The Everly Brothers, and Benny Goodman.

I couldn't have survived four hours of do nothing boredom every other night without my old friend Mr. Radio...

"Hey Sailors, this is Old Bill unloading Seafarer nut huggin' blues... Come on down today and I'll have Mr. "you looking good' Wong Ho make you look sharp for that special girl... And have that sweet thing wondering why you are constantly trying to find a way to keep Mr. Willie from being worn out with tailor made crotch friction."

They promised us the world and gave us Dinah Shore and Jo Stafford. It never got any better than that if it didn't rain.

Fair Winds and Following Seas by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Gentlemen, I did my damndest to be conciliatory. I figured that you would make allowances for the ravings of a lunatic. Stone should have posted a warning stating that the **'SURGEON GENERAL HAD DETERMINED THAT NUCLEAR POWER SAILORS WOULD GET HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND MAJOR HEARTBURN.'**

I now remember the major problem I had with the moonbeam navy... Arrogance. When a certain individual on Ron's BBS tied my dislike of nukes to disrespect for the loss of 52 boats in World War II, I got caught up in the same crap I waded around in as a youngster. I am not numbered with the brightest of the species, but the stretch of THAT linkage was a mind boggler.

I rode diesel boats... They are all I know. For a variety of reasons, a number probably childish in retrospect - especially looking back over a forty year span, I never really connected my service with anything involving generations beyond Harder, Darter, Trigger, and Trout. I was not alone... We all felt that way. I say 'all,' meaning all the guys I ran with.

Case in point... Early 60s... Before Thresher went down... Submarine birthday dinner somewhere on NOB. Vice Admiral Elton W. Grenfell, SUBLANT... Big Pacific war skipper and great gentlemen. Tickets are big bucks for non-rated men to pony up. We went... Full dress canvas... Looking like we crawled off a "JOIN THE NAVY" recruiting poster. We even behaved ourselves.

Admiral Grenfell takes the mike, welcomes us and begins,

"It has been a wonderful year for our nuclear navy..."

COB got up, chugged his drink and said,

"Boys, we've bought tickets to a nuke pep rally. Anyone wants to join me, I'll be at Bells tossing down a few in remembrance of the Great Year in the Ping Time Boats."

Smoke boat sailors drifted out in twos and threes. In ten minutes, there were a helluva lot of empty chairs.

Recognizing that public focus was rightly on achievements like the quantum leaps we were making in submarine technology didn't make it that much easier. The family was celebrating before their ancestral element was dead. So we banded together... Did our diesel boat stuff and divorced ourselves from whatever was going on in parts of the force we didn't belong to. I was not alone... Somebody out there left an empty chair that

night because Bells was packed with a lot of well dressed sailors up until closing time. We sung the Gitmo song, drank beer and yelled,

"Still answering bells on the battery... 400 feet, five down."

My stories were for those lads... Pure and simple. Has nothing to do with denigrating the memory of the brave men who paid the ultimate price in the Pacific. I will always burn candles in the altar of my heart to the members of those fine and noble ships. They gave me the legacy we held sacred. They put the meaning in my dolphins.

My stories reflected the myopic view of a lad who rode the worn out boats they left us. They portray a time when we cannibalized retiring ships for hatch gaskets and anything else no longer available in the supply pipeline... The stuff needed to keep us going. And we went... Month after month... Target time... Out and down... Snorkel time... We did it and did it well. Inside my little slice of the submarine service pie I got to sail with some really good men and am eternally grateful for that. We got no 'Answering bells on the battery dead air run' pins... No 'Get out of jail free' cards... No 'Look at me mom' attention. That's whining, and hell, we can only whine to folks who did it... But we can also laugh... We always laughed. Like a guy who gets his tallywhacker caught in his zipper... It hurts like hell but it's really funny!

I loved - and still love - my submarine service. Hell, I don't have a clue about the dead serious, highly professional, technocratic force of today. I relate to the 'happy-go-lucky' force of yesteryear. It ran on beer and bunker oil and left antler marks on every tree in the forest.

Gringo remembers... Cowboy remembers... Sid Harrison remembers... Doc and the magnificent RamJet sure as hell remember... And God knows Stone was there. For a time, there was another 'Camelot' where men danced with the devil and pissed against the wind.

Memory Flashes by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

IC Electrician Guy Peto always kept a Windex spray bottle filled with Varsol in his side locker. You see, he had a new bride... When we came in, after we doubled up all lines and put our brow over, Peto pulled out his Varsol loaded Windex bottle and sprayed the front of his blues.

"What the hell you do that for?"

"Last year, I slow danced with some honey in Montevideo. When I got home, Jill swore she smelled perfume in my blues. Damn if I'm gonna hop in that trick bag again anytime soon."

Jack Snider "Sonargasket" from Arizona or New Mexico. Our sonar shack was below the control room... Jack damn near lived in there... All by himself, in a space the size of an average linen closet. He made hand-tooled leather stuff down there, since listening with headphones left his hands free. Jack had great ears... Used to brag that he could hear tick farts in Tokyo. When he wasn't making wallets, pocketbooks, holsters, moccasins, belts and other stuff... He was sorting out sounds.

One night, Jack opened the manhole cover to the shack. The diving officer closed it, so no one would inadvertently step into the opening, fall in and wreck Jack. Immediately it flew open again.

"What the hell's wrong, Jack?"

"Mr. Caldwell, I had three helpings of lima beans tonight sir and can't stand it down here in this jack-in-the-box hole, living with the post consumption by products of those limas... Just had to share it with my shipmates."

Within minutes, it became evident that he had a major methane production problem.

Dusty Hamilton, Nebraska, was engaged to hometown girl who wrote letters... Perfumed correspondence that read like pages torn from a nymphomaniac's logbook. Intended for Dusty's eyes alone, they were read aloud to a devoted fan club that would assemble in the crews' mess for the dramatic reading of each installment.

"I miss you so, Dusty... If you were here, I would..."

We were a long way from anything wearing a skirt and lacey skivvies... We loved it.

Barnacle Bill Jackson, torpedo pusher first... Returning from leave on Trailways bus... B.B. heads aft to use the little john in the rear of the bus... Parks himself on the head... Bus stops for a red light. Large truck bangs into rear of bus... B.B. slams into forward head bulkhead, compounds right arm while contents of head chemical tank erupt and cover him. Rescue people get him out and immobilize his arm. At some point, lady rescue technician gets a whiff of Barnacle Bill and recognizes what he is coated in.

"Oh sir, we've got to get you out of those nasty clothes."

"Don't worry about it darlin'... I've smelled worse. I'm a submarine sailor."

B.B. runs an auto supply outlet now and plays banjo in a hillbilly band. They never made a finer boat sailor.

New cook - will remain nameless, ordered catsup. Thought unit of issue was by individual bottle... Turned out to be by case. We are loading stores at 0730 for 0800 underway when we find ourselves up to our eyeballs in cases of catsup... Deck force loads excess onto a torpedo trolley... Goes to pier head parking lot and loads it into

automobiles to store it until we return in two weeks. Stupid move... Becomes damn near impossible to get shore duty Dick Tracy force to understand that crew had not conspired in wholesale catsup theft. I never figured out what these shore duty geniuses thought we were going to do with sixty cases of catsup... We finally convinced them to start worrying when we tried to get out the gate with five tons of hot dogs and a couple of truckloads of buns.

We all have 'em... Boat memories. They return at weird times when you are in the company of people who would never understand, much less believe them.

There Was a Time, Long Ago by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In our day, going to sea was an adventure. People would never understand how cramped our world was. In movies, it always looked neat, clean and roomy.

When we loaded stores for several weeks, we had to store it everywhere... A few examples.

We had two enlisted showers. We had to keep one clear so corpsman, cooks and messcooks could stay clean. The other got three croaker bags of spuds.

Big cans of sugar, flour and coffee were stored two high, outboard the engines. It was hell to crawl back there when the damn things were hammering out turns.

We laid down a cardboard carpet of can cases on the after battery walking deck... Two deep... Made you feel two feet taller when you made your way forward and also made the poor bastards in the lower bunks have to damn near Crisco their butts to get into their racks. Once in, you had some idea how claustrophobic a coffin must be.

When the messcooks bricked in the passageway with the cases, they used a marking pen and a code known only to themselves and possibly the Jolly Green Giant. This was supposed to allow them to enter the compartment when the animals were sleeping and locate stuff the cook needed. At times, this became damn near impossible. Those times the cook would turn on the white lights, bang on the bottom of an aluminum pot and yell,

"Okay ladies, rise and shine... Need six cans of beets... Six cans of beets... Up and at it."

"Screw you and the horse you rode in on... Turn off the gahdam lights and get your ugly butt outta here."

"Beets, sleeping beauties... Six cans."

"You gahdam gut bandit! Everything you cook tastes like shit anyway... Go get something you can find and turn off the f-----g lights!"

"You're so sweet my little garbage mouth darlings and I slave over a hot stove just to generate this outpouring of love and affection... Beets, sweethearts... Beets... The sooner you find 'em, the sooner you little ungrateful, worthless sonuvabitches can go beddie-bye again."

It was either find what he needed or shoot him, so we usually located the stuff.

There was one obvious benefit to living in the after battery. You were literally surrounded by stuff to eat. This allowed you to enjoy the diesel boat sailors equivalent of breakfast in bed. You could knock a hole in a case, grab a can, zip the lid out, and chow down. Granted the contents of the can had to lend itself to be eaten without preparation like heating, cooking or mixing, which limited the menu, somewhat.

The all-time crew favorite was 'pigmy peters', known in the surface world as Vienna sausage. You could knock the lid out of a can of peters and pass it around... Fish the little rascals out and enjoy a little nocturnal snack with the last man tossing the juice filled can into the head waste bucket.

Another crowd pleaser was crackers and peanut butter. We were a Peter Pan boat... Other boats were Skippy boats. We killed Skippy eaters and shot their remains out the GDU. We stored peanut butter in the portside waterway and always had five or six boxes of saltines stored above the vent lines in the alley.

We had an unwritten code that governed life in the alley. One of the cardinal no-nos was using anything other than a designated eating utensil to dig peanut butter out of the communal jar. This rule became necessary when an engineman striker was found using his comb to spread peanut butter.

It was simple. You got a spoon, drilled a hole in the handle and hung it on your bunk chain with twenty-one thread shot line or a piece of dog tag chain.

All it took to launch a food fiesta, a little subsurface luau, was to yell,

"Let's feed the roaches!"

We shared space with little brown multi-legged creatures that thrived on cracker crumbs and God knows what else. They never looked like they were missing meals. Periodically, the Navy would fumigate the boat and we would return to find our little pals lying around like empty peanut hulls... We missed their little gentle footsteps across our faces at night as they searched for an ear or vacant nostril to homestead and bear their young.

Cockroaches multiply at a rate that would eclipse the Chinese. A National Basketball League player would have envied the sex life of an average SUBRON SIX sea-going roach. We did.

Their favorite hangout was the bread locker. We used to say,

"If you don't like raisin bread, shake your slice and all the raisins would get up and run away."

As a courtesy, we would knock on the bread locker before we opened it so they could go hide. Rumor had it that sudden bright light hurt their little eyes.

The Navy gave us spray cans of stuff that was supposed to send them to cockroach heaven in large numbers. We read the contents and decided the last thing a diesel boat needed was to add all that weird crap to air that already had enough strange shit running around in it. We had no desire to father three-headed kids or watch our toes turn green and fall off. We deep-sixed the stuff and continued to feed the roaches... Besides, we had gotten used to roach exploration expeditions, discovering new worlds in our ears.

There was another delicacy known to all boat sailors that went by the most indelicate names... "Horsecock"... 'Donkey Dick'... Or Italian hard salami. It had a butcher twine loop at one end that allowed you to thread the loop over an operating vent handle. They would swing back and forth in a rolling sea.

Horsecock and mayonnaise sandwiches was a mid-rat staple... And a fond memory. Wish I had a nickel for every night I stood there dripping wet, sharing a cup of hot coffee, wrapping myself around a two-layer donkey dick sandwich and enjoying life with some of the finest people I've ever known.

At battle stations when they set condition Baker, they would call you on the XJA and tell you to open the access plates behind the bulkhead flappers so the cooks could pass donkey dick sandwiches and coffee thermos's in to the hungry apes in the forward room.

You had to be one of us to understand. Life on those boats did something to you... It made you appreciate the little things in life... Stuff most people took for granted. It established the common denominator that allows me to know that in writing about our life, there are men out there who will understand, appreciate and remember. I have carried these wonderful memories for years with no one to share them with. I hope I'm not boring anyone's socks off.

Arleigh Burke by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The best part about my days in the diesel boat service was that it afforded me the honored privilege of being able to say,

"I served in Arliegh Burke's Navy. He was the finest CNO, Chief of Naval Operations, we ever had."

We loved him and would have followed him anywhere. '31 knot Burke' was a true hero... A perfect gentleman that housed a tough, fearless armor-piercing sonuvabitch.

He never forgot his bluejackets and his bluejackets never forgot him. All the CNOs who followed Admiral Burke have been small bore in comparison.

If you were not fortunate enough to serve in Arleigh Burke's Navy, you really missed something. You missed manly leadership on a grand scale. You missed leadership by example and you missed a time where it felt great to be a red-blooded American bluejacket.

We owned the seas. We were all 20 feet high... Bulletproof... And could chew our way out of a Mosler safe.

The Rickover Wrecking Ball by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

So the Rickovarians are popping the wrecking ball to the old Basic Enlisted Submarine School... Sort of ethnically cleansing us off the map. First, they changed the name from SubBase New London to SubBase Groton... Then they converted the raghat club into a beauty shop... Then they filled all the beautiful green open spaces with buildings... Make that, concrete structures uglier than Hyman himself. When their grand design was completed, they had taken a lovely tradition-rich setting, a campus-like location that complimented the U.S. Coast Guard Academy across the river, a national historic treasure and systematically converted it into a mass of sterile, look-alike industrial concrete boxes patterned after public housing projects... Or the company owned housing for a Harlan County coal mine. The place is so jammed with concrete boxes, before long to add additional boxes, they will have to



Crisco the sonuvabitches and drive 'em in with a sledge hammer.

They scrapped the escape tower but forgot to remove the damn thing from the base insignia. Makes me wonder if the new guys go around pointing at that non-existent structure on their base insignia patch, scratch their heads and ask,

"Hey, wazzat... Huh chief? Waddizzit??"

"Damned if I know... Whatever in the hell it was, it's gone now... I heard it was something the Navy stuck up so drunk diesel boat sailors could find their way back to the base."

Whatever happened to the miniature Jap and German subs? I sure hope they don't give them away as door prizes at the annual moonbeam ball... Or chrome plate them for hood ornaments on SUBLANT staff vehicles.

What did they do with barracks 143? That's where we lived. 180 red-blooded American bluejackets in one big room... Two to a rack... For idiots who could not understand the concept of sleeping head to foot so you didn't breathe your germs into the guy racked out next to you, some genius had stenciled "HEAD" and "FOOT" on each metal rack. A logical extension of such brilliance should have called for stenciling "PARK YOUR WORTHLESS BUTT HERE" on all head seats.

Aluminum lockers separated the port and starboard sides of the barracks... Those standard navy lockers that would hold only what you carried in your seabag. I understand that today's 'Gentlemen Submarine People' have chests of drawers, curtains, desks with lamps, chairs, a community ironing board (what happened to the wool blanket on the concrete deck?), and something called a lounge.

"The lounge is available around the clock for academic work and review or recreational reading..."

Recreational reading? What in the hell is recreational reading? In my day, if they caught you recreationally reading your shoe size, shirt label or the printed words on your gahdam draft card, they ate you for lunch.

If you had to study, you put your name on the firewatches 'piss call' list and when he busted you out of the rack, you wandered up and met the other academically deficient idiots in your class, sitting in the shower, quizzing each other. When you reached a point where independent concentration was required, you camped out in a head stall until your feet fell asleep and all the nerve endings below your hip joint went on strike. Those were the 'No frills - We do it for pride, not pay - Hardcore - You blink, you're gone - We are training you to operate subs to sink ships and win wars' days.

Those were the days when giants roamed the earth... Meat-eaters... Nut-crushing boat sailors. The days before submarine leadership waded knee-deep in social polish,

behavioral templating and social engineering (including bringing co-ed crews to combat in the boats)... The days when they made you work and sweat to earn Silver Dolphins... The days before they reduced the par value of Silver Dolphins to the level of a midshipman's Cracker Jack prize. Maybe they will find they can rat hole a few more so-called 'cold war dividend' bucks by making plastic dolphins with rhinestone eyes and glow in the dark fins... Not to mention turning the new 'kinder and gentler' SubBase Groton into an amusement park.

In the old days, we didn't have environmental control and zonal air conditioning. Our A/C had two settings... "OPEN WINDOW" and "CLOSE WINDOW"... Didn't take a Rickover toe dance to sort that out.

They are tearing down a magnificent piece of true Naval history. A shrine to the men who took iron ships under the sea and ate the heart and soul out of the Jap navy. A school whose graduates could fill bushel baskets with everything from the Congressional Medal of Honor to the Combat Patrol Pin.

And the gahdam shame of it all is, the sonuvabitches calling for the wrecking ball, the third generation of beady-eyed Hyman's Handmaidens of Submarine Sensitivity and Technology, these poor shortchanged, instant tradition bastards have no clue, that like so much of what predated sunbeam propulsion, that they are trashing what should have become a national treasure.



Who knows... In the not so distant future, we may award a demolition contract for Bancroft Hall at the Naval Academy and replace it with a giant lot of Winnebago campers and call it Rickover Hall.

If you rode petroleum-powered submersible iron, a little piece of you is going to be carried away with that wrecking ball... They turned our boats into razor blades and now our school will become bricks for Taco Bell.

Viva la tradition... Viva la moonbeam...

The United States Naval Submarine Force - A one hundred year history with a ten-minute memory.

Gut Bandits and Belly Robbers by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Without question, we had the best cooks in the Navy and the finest chow. Did we tell the cooks how good they were? Are you kidding? Insulting cooks was the major form of recreation and crew entertainment. Thin-skinned cooks didn't last that long. A cook had to be both a great cook and have the hide of a Sherman tank.

In the past, we had a discussion on creamed chipped beef - On toast 'Shit on a Shingle', 'Puss n' Scabs', 'Foreskins on a Raft', 'Mung'... A dear child has many names. I have to go on record... I loved the stuff. I literally ate tons of it. While my shipmates moaned and groaned, I scoffed it up.

My mom died when I was nine. I grew up eating institutional chow... Good cream chipped beef is good rib-sticking chow. Kids who grew up eating mom's traditional breakfast, entered the Navy considering Captain Crunch, Pop Tarts, Cream of Wheat, Cheerios and other stuff like toaster waffles, as what breakfast should be.

In most instances, they would have done one helluva lot better if they had thrown away the contents and eaten the gahdam box... Probably more nutritious.

If there are any old smoke boat stewburners out there, I doff my hat to you. I never ate better chow before or after my boat service. You guys dabbled in culinary magic and performed miracles with stainless steel pots, baking sheets and old worn out equipment. We handed you insult, you gave us great chow. There has never been a more lopsided return on investment.

We always knew when you loused something up... You always covered up with either canned mystery meat or gahdam macaroni and that Navy Velveeta cheese. That Velveeta cheese was at the extreme tail end of what could be remotely understood as acceptable chow. You could vulcanize tractor trailer tires with Navy Velveeta and you would eliminate all those recap chunks on the side of American highways.

That stuff never dissolved... It had a half-life on par with ancient Egyptian statuary. I still have a five pound wad of it stuck in my lower intestinal tract.

With all the asbestos we breathed and the Velveeta we ate, when they cremate an old smoke boat sailor, they are going to have to bust our lungs up with a sledgehammer and shovel a lot of melted cheese out of those cremation contraptions.

It was great food.

I remember standing topside watch in Halifax. It was cold... Had the 4 to 8... The after battery hatch was open. For an hour before dawn, the smell of baking cinnamon buns floated topside through the hatch. By the time I raised the below decks watch and got a load of fresh baked buns topside, my tongue was hanging out like 3 feet of red blanket.

I shared them with a boat watch moored outboard and the duty watch on a Canadian can. I hollered down for more but then ol' Rodney "Rat" Johnson came topside. He was wearing the professional vestments of his position... A dirty apron, a sweat-soaked shirt... And an inverted white hat.

"Dex... What 'n the hell's going on? Where are my night buns disappearing to?"

I yelled to the guys on the other ships...

"This is the guy who makes these great rolls!"

"Hey, Cookie... You want a job in the Royal Canadian Navy?"

"Hey Cookie, damn good buns!"

"Hey Cookie... What 'n the hell you doin' in the Navy... You could make a gahdam fortune sellin' these things."

Only time I saw Rat at a loss for words. He smiled and said,

"Tell the freeloading bastards I'll send up some more and make twice as many tomorrow night."

He didn't have to do that. He was a big part of what serving in the boats meant to a lot of us.

The commisaryman of the old sub force put up with a lot... I know, I pinned a lot of it on them. You could steal a couple of brownies and get chased back to the maneuvering room by a man waving a cleaver. You could have someone shake you awake in the middle of the night of your twenty-first birthday... To be greeted by forty-odd shipmates participating in a conspiracy to wish you happy birthday. The centerpiece was a birthday cake with 21 Marlboro cigarettes sticking in it and a sentimental inscription that read, "Dex, now you can buy a legal drink"

You old boat cooks were the best. In the Great Receiving Station in the Sky, Rat Johnson will be standing in a little galley that's tough to turn around in... He'll be feeding us all great stuff and yelling,

"If you bastards have any complaints... Eat down the street." He always said that.

The Daily Horsecrap Ration by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The 'Alley' was a kind of Cosa Nostra Cub Scout den... A tree house for Huns... An asylum and refuge for Naval peasants, all rolled into one. Our job as permanent residents was to take minor schemes and mature them into all-hands conspiracies, sinister plots and peon uprisings. In conjunction with the above, our collateral duty was to develop new and exotic ways to drive every Chief on the boat nuts... Stark raving, out of control bonkers... Not that driving a Chief nuts took a concentrated effort.

We got together and solved world problems. We also reviewed proposed applications for membership and anointed the chosen. The only thing that could hold up membership was one's rate of military mindset degeneration... Sort of a squared away attitude reversal and backward to buccaneer evolutionary process. According to the Retrograde Darwinian Theory, in a single million-year enlistment we would have regrown tails and returned to caves.

The after battery was the informational crossroad for all enlisted-gathered intelligence. We brokered lies, innuendo, rumors, speculation, wild-ass guessing, "Wouldn't it be nice if..." wishful thinking and no basis, strictly made up nonsense. We were a totally unethical gossip-spreading hoarseshit mill. Our motto was,

"If you haven't heard a good rumor by noon... Start one."

We could take wishful thinking, stir in some highly plausible supporting bullshit, attribute it to some conversation inadvertently overheard involving the skipper and God knows who else, and float it.

"I heard the Old Man asking someone up forward to pull all the harbor approach charts to Port Everglades... Wonder why he'd be pulling those?"

Ten minutes later, some snipe would grab you by the arm, cup his hand and whisper in your ear,

"We're making turns for Miami..."

We could be hammering straight north... Didn't matter.

Once a submarine sailor starts trafficking in negotiable horsecrap it takes on a life of its own.

Members of Requin's crew couldn't pass any grapevine scuttlebutt on without bolting something original on it.

"Fer crissakes wingnut, where'n the hell did you pick that up?"

It always had to have germinated from officer conversation or be rooted in officer-controlled inside info.

"This is no shit... 'Teapot' Bill is two-blocking some chick married to some four-striper... She told him."

Information gained in a reciprocal sperm swap was valid... Very negotiable.

Our steward was a Filipino named Quesada... Known as 'Que.' Great guy. Que had the wardroom wired. He had acoustic magnetic ears... He picked up everything. Since he was used to operating in fluent Spanish, the English translations were a little ragged, but there was always enough to mold into "You'll never guess what Que heard." Major high-powered, high-yield, action-packed trap bait.

Adrian Stuke was by far the greatest gilt edge purveyor of portable horseshit. He sold stuff everyone bought. He sold lies that might have four or five delayed-action lies built into them. Stuke was the master... He even sold me some bullshit and I was his best friend... His runnin' mate! When he started shoveling it, everyone showed up with a wheelbarrow and a child-like faith in the veracity of the Wonderful Wizard of Straight Gauge Dope.

"Once you actually believe that it is the birthday of Saint Archibald, the Latin American Patron Saint of Free Beer and Gratuitous Sex... They can sell you damn near anything."

There is a downside to engaging in the bogus poop trade. There is a point where your shipmates won't ask you what time it is... At that point, you have to start rumors by the 'Confirming Question' method.

"Hey, any truth to the rumor that the Op Order call for drawing fuel and stores in La Rochelle?"

Then it begins.

"Saw the French coastal approach chart on the wardroom table two nights ago..."

"That's nothing. Ensign Pinhead has an English to French / French to English dictionary in his stateroom."

"Yeh, well the Old Man has the NATO Recognition Signal Book laying out on his bunk..."

In the parlance of your after battery rat, this is a "Let them convince me" example of boomerang bullshit. Cast your nonsense upon the messdeck and it will return ten-fold... With hair horns and one helluva long tail. Truth was totally incompatible with diesel submarine duty... I offer Rontini's BBS as exhibit 'A' in my argument.

The cooks had a Navy directive that gave them the officially designated terms to use when announcing meals. The only two I can remember were "Savory green beans" and "Succulent beef stew." There were officially prescribed descriptive adjectives for everything they fed you. It was important to the cooks that these terms were used when announcing meals... Lots of luck.

"Attention all hands... The evening meal tonight will consist of amazing leftovers... Members of the crew may remember the meatloaf that visited us last Wednesday... Well, tonight Mr. Meatloaf will pay us another visit, along with his pals 'Second time around' beans and 'Reincarnated' potato salad. Please arrive early to get a good seat and eat hardy so this will be Mr. Meatloaf's final appearance."

"Following chow, we will be showing the evening movie... The movie for tonight is Guns on the Pecos. A class B western starring people nobody ever heard of. A vote will be taken on what was worse, four day-old meatloaf or the cowboy movie."

"A couple of crew announcements... Quesada will be cutting hair in the forward torpedo room. For those of you who don't give a good gahdam about personal appearance, a Quesada hair mow and scalp rip will set you back a buck."

"At 2000, there will be a paperback book swap in the after room. Lt. Wilson will attend to cover wardroom trading interests."

"Anyone seeking transportation to Philadelphia... And who doesn't mind riding in a rattletrap piece of ill-maintained junk, contact Peto... He's broke and needs you for the gas money."

"Will the ill-mannered ape who removed the girlie magazines from the after battery head... Return them. Signed, the topside gang vigilante committee."

"The Orion is conducting a blood drive next Wednesday. The COB has asked me to inform you that Requin will have 100% participation... Even if he has to hunt you down like a mad dog, cut off your foot and stand you up in a bucket... Consider this a gentle reminder."

"In keeping with the Capt'n's policy of married guys bringing wives 'good to be home' presents, Mr. Woods will hold wife present inspection in the forward battery, immediately following the wardroom movie... Khaki sackers, brown-baggers and hen-pecked sonuvabitches will report forward with this trips collection of skimpy nighties, tasteless lingerie and original oil paintings of naked hula dancers on velvet."

"For the unenlightened, Chief Bretton will be holding a trim and drain instructional walk-through tonight at 1900. The Hogan's Alley Chapter of Friends of the Little Sisters of the Poor and Feed the Children Fund, will be accepting anchor pool donations."

"And last, the COB wishes to announce that being of a generous nature, he is extending an invitation to the entire ship's company, to attend tomorrow night's all-hands turn to. Thank you notes, valentines and other communications of love and undying devotion can be pinned on the goat locker curtain."

"That's it for tonight gentlemen... Movie starts in ten minutes... It's messcook popcorn night."

Bullshit was such a dietary staple on smoke boats, we would have died without our massive daily ration.

We Were Young... Long Ago by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

One of the great things about crew reunions is the opportunity to rekindle associations with old shipmates and dredge up long forgotten memories of days when no one worried about the future because 'tomorrow' always took care of itself. It always did, and we all planned to marry beautiful girls who would never grow old and would live forever. Boat reunions have a way of torpedoing that horseshit. The wives have kept their youthful good looks, but your old shipmates have re-ballasted and look like they missed a few trips to the yard.

So what you end up with are a bunch of old coots who spend a helluva lot of time tossing down beer and saying stuff like,

"Hey, you remember that kid from New Jersey? Jeezus, can't think of his name... The little skinny kid... Electrician... The guy who drove that Mercury with more Bondo patches than original metal... Yeah, that's the one! The kid who left a present he bought for his mom in some gin mill in Hamilton and jumped out of the liberty launch to swim back and get it... Yeah, and he turned up at morning quarters soaking wet and smiling like he had good sense, holding up a water-soaked box of stupid earrings..."

"That's the idiot... Can't remember his name... We called him 'Sparky'... Good kid... Always good for a fiver 'til payday."

That's the only immortality worth a damn... Ol' smokeboat lads remembering you were a good boat sailor and a fine shipmate. Hell, we were all idiots... No sonuvabitch who could shuffle a full deck would intentionally crawl into something equivalent to eighty oil drums welded end to end just for the privilege of watching mites do acrobatic tricks in his breakfast cereal.

We never gained the level of sophistication that other folks who had far less international travel experience, gained.

Take wine, for example. Most of the stuff we got wrapped around had aluminum screw tops, was less than six months old and tasted like the byproduct of some industrial

chemical process. Nobody ever had a corkscrew... If the jug had a cork, you drove the sonuvabitch down with the blunt-ended blade of an electrician's knife and watched it snorkel around in there 'til you drained the contents.

We never knew there were things running around in the world known as 'communicable diseases'... There were always a couple of duty containers of distilled spirits being passed around at every fleet landing in the wee hours. Didn't even matter what boat you were riding... Only qualifications were Dolphins and a mouth.

"Hey buddy... Have a drink!"

Bleary-eyed bastards heading back to the boats and weird, no-name booze in flat pints being killed and tossed off the pier.

How many of you reading this inane stuff ever saluted the tender quarterdeck with a flat pint of distilled spirits tucked in the rear of his blues, up under his jumper? Come on now, that couldn't be Requin-specific.

How many guys who had the duty ever shared a cup of coffee topside with a returning shipmate, that had been doctored up with something he picked up 'on the beach', that resembled paint remover or bore solvent? Anyone giving a negative reply will grow a Pinocchio nose.

One benefit the nuke navy has that we never had is the Surgeon General's Warning... In our day, stuff never came with "This shit will kill you..." on the label. Life was a crap shoot... The way you found out stuff would kill you was, you died. The smokeboat lads drank stuff the government wouldn't let 'em make today.

And another thing... Today, everyone is worried about the effects of second-hand smoke. Holy mackerel! I've seen times when we were buttoned up, making turns on the battery and the cigar and cigarette smoke was so gahdam thick, you could hardly see the needles in the shallow water gauges. The only times it cleared up was when the air got so damn dead it wouldn't support combustion and you couldn't light a match.

The Navy in its infinite wisdom, installed a circulating air system to make sure the entire crew could share and partake in the joy of floating atmospheric airborne crap. A cook could bust a blue egg on the grill and in 30 seconds, every poor bastard in every compartment got to share the unique olfactory stimulation with the rest of his shipmates.

There was so much junk floating around in the air inside of an operating diesel boat, it is a wonder our air compressors didn't spit out plywood.

At reunions, you recall all that stuff with men you shared it all with... No one else would believe it and if they did, wouldn't care. That is why writing this junk has been so much fun.

It is a shame no one with proper skills and the gift for making things socially acceptable could have recorded our history. It was a special time, but we went from World War II to the atomic era and nobody took the time to chronicle the twilight years of the combustion-powered submersibles. I guess folks could make a point out of the fact we never did anything spectacular... Never pulled any rabbits out of magic hats or pulled off the kind of stuff Tom Clancy writes about.

Was riding big ugly stuff, displacing salt water, fouling fishing nets, wearing out bar stools, scaring hell out of marine life, and playing ASW target all we were good for?

Well, we were there. Nobody came to get us... No one had to claw-hammer us out of society and force us to do what we did. We volunteered and it was rough duty... That's a fact. We made our equipment serviceable, did our job and were a proud bunch... We served with men we came to deeply respect.

It would be nice to be able to have a chronicle of those years as a tribute to the happy-go-lucky days before sedate professionalism gobbled up the life we lived. Now, the only folks we can share our times with are old barnacle butts and broken down barmaids... And guys with computers you never can share a bucket of suds with. Damn shame.

It was all so long ago. We were young... That was all there was to it... We were young.

Vic Casciola by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Vic Casciola, Radioman, Shipmate.

Late one evening, before our last reunion, I got a phone call. When I heard the voice, years melted away.

"Dex... Vic Casciola... You remember me?"

Did I remember Vic? Does a hobby horse have a hickory dick? You bet I remember Vic!!

Vic had a medical condition that erased a lot of his memory and was phoning to see if I thought the lads would recall who he was. He didn't want to show up at the reunion if nobody would remember him. He also wanted his son to know that long ago, his dad rode the boats.

So, this is for his son. It's not much... Others could do better. I'm not articulate enough to capture on paper the unique, one-of-a-kind shipmate that was Vic. All I want to do is validate Vic's credentials.

Vic arrived on Requin wearing paratrooper wings over his ribbons. Paratrooper wings and Silver Dolphins... Talk about double-dipping lunatics.

Vic was a radioman... Make that triple-dipping lunacy. He was the absolute master of the "speed key." A contraption radio guys used to tap out flips and blips that to fellow practitioners of flip and blip transmission, could be translated into communication understood by normal members of the human race. Vic could pound out stuff at a rate that constantly frustrated his recipients. Many nights, radiomen receiving Vic's "heat" would have to tell him to hold up until they could hunt up some poor devil who could read at his rate... Like going to find a catcher for Nolan Ryan's fast ball. Vic could bang out code faster than Gypsy Rose could pop a garter snap.

He was amazing. He was also a master at sneaking stuff into official traffic. In the old days, boat sailors didn't get fifty word 'poopy-grams'... We got 'Little Orphan Annie drops' and anything you could con a radioman to sneak into a message after he caught up on ALLNAV transmissions.

A 'Little Orphan Annie drop' came from naval aviators. The good ones, God bless 'em, would go to the tender, collect your mail, put it into a cleaned up paint can along with a couple of recent newspapers, a dog-eared Playboy, and two or three sports magazines. They would tape the contraption up and drop it to you when you were surfaced.

They would fly over and yell stuff over the radio,

"Mark center... Mark ringer..."

And out of the bottom of a P2V would come a tumbling can. Lookouts would cheer and the can would slam into the swells.

If you were lucky, someone on deck would fish out the can with a boathook, mail would be distributed in the control room and we would spike the morale-meter.

If you were unlucky, the sunovabitch would sink... And set up housekeeping with crabs and a lot of German U-Boat crews. One Christmas, we lost a can on a three contraption drop. I later learned that a port wine soaked, pecan loaded fruitcake my aunt sent me, had been misdirected to the deck force of the Titanic.

That brings us back to method two of clandestine shore communication... Vic Casciola and his magical speed key. The poor bastards in the Orion radio shack would get stuff like this...

"REQUIN ETA 1600Z... REQUIRE WELDER FOR DECK DAMAGE ON STAND BY... PHONE 319-6247 FOR RESULTS OF LITTLE LEAGUE SERIES... REQUIN TO DEPART NORFOLK 0800Z 031561... WILL REQUIRE STORES, TWO WEEKS... FUEL... CHARTS ACCORDING TO OP ORDERS... PHONE 319-4670 TELL MARY DAD WILL FUND PROM DRESS... WILL LOAD 2 MK37 TORPEDOES... HAVE INJURED MAN TO TRANSFER NORFOLK NAVAL HOSPITAL REQUIRE TRANSPORT... PATIENT AMBULATORY... PHONE 319-4026 OBTAIN RESULTS PREGNANCY TEST... WILL NEED NEST

ASSIGNMENT AND LINE HANDLERS... (pause)... WILL EXPECT ANSWERS NEXT TRANSMISSION"

Magic Man could get everything from clothing measurements to racing results and the wardroom never knew.

Vic could fall asleep in the middle of a bar brawl. We didn't know that it was probably an early indication of his later medical problem.

Once, the diving officer was told that Vic was asleep on watch in the radio shack. Major no-no. When the diving officer went to the shack, there was Casciola wearing headphones with his eyes closed.

"Casciola... You asleep?"

"No sir."

Never opened his eyes.

"Well, what in the hell are you doing with your eyes closed?"

"Checking my eyelids for holes."

The worst duty on Requin was having the below deck watch and having to wake Vic up. The sonuvabitch could sleep through the last five minutes of a hockey game, a five hundred pound bomb drop and the second coming of Christ. The COB once said if Vic had been at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, he would have slept through it. I would rather have taken raw meat from a half-starved Bengal tiger than have been sent to separate Vic from his rack. It ranked up there with the most delicate surgical procedures... You had to remove the flashcover from Vic's back without getting your lights punched out. We toyed with the idea of doing it electrically, but how could you wire up a guy who could have the tender phone your mom to wish her a happy birthday?

Vic Casciola... Did we remember you? Hell no.

Everyone wore Dolphins, paratrooper wings, sent code at the speed of light and slept like a bank vault.

35 Years with Metric Built Blond by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Have you ever wondered about the girls who married us? Did you ever think about what it must be like to be saddled with a life partner genetically linked to men with hydraulic oil, diesel smoke and salt water in their veins and a childlike faith in adventure they can

never shake? We should be eternally thankful that God made girls who could put up with us.

I married a Norwegian girl. A little homegrown, metric built, blue-eyed blond... Pretty little thing when I married her 35 years ago and a beautiful full-blown woman now. We've wrinkled up a lot of bed linen in all those years but I wouldn't trade her for all the oil in Saudi. She never made me grow up. I think the secret to long range marriage is not trying to change the person you love.

We are going to return to Bermuda for our 35th. wedding anniversary. Last time I was in Bermuda was in the mid 60s when Requin dropped the hook.

Everything was sky high except rum and coke... That only set you back fifteen cents. You could get blurred vision and a head full of buzzing bees for a buck.

But one thing stands out in my memory... You could wear loud shirts.

When I was nine, my mom died and I went to live with an aunt who did her damndest to round off my sharp edges. Kids from East Tennessee aren't securely bolted to the planet. At nine, I was full of fleas, devoid of social grace, with a distinct aversion to combs, soap and water, proper manners, and brussel sprouts. My taste in literature was limited to Red Ryder funny books and Popular Mechanics. I later learned that these qualities were what they looked for in diesel boat sailors.

My dear aunt wore herself out trying to saddle break a kid who knew that his life's path would not take him to a whole lot of places where putting your elbows on the table or failing to put your napkin on your lap, really mattered.

My first contact with the submarine force came when I saw Operation Pacific at the Tivoli theater in Chattanooga. Cary Grant blew up a lot of Japs. At the time, blowing up as many Japs as possible was a good thing... Owning a Jap car would not have made you very popular. Little did I know sitting in that dark theater, sharing popcorn and a box of Black Crows with my best pal, that someday I would call one of those iron monsters home.

Once my aunt took me to J. C. Pennys to buy me a couple of shirts for school. They had this printed flannel shirt. It was made so that the fabric looked like irregular pieces of spotted pony hide... Brown and white and black and white horsehide had been laced together with rawhide. It was just the kind of shirt Red Ryder would have worn after his Saturday night bath, when he and Little Beaver would have gone into Dodge City to drink whiskey and pat saloon girls on the behind. To a ten year old, it was the most magnificent piece of clothing in the world. To my aunt, it was a tasteless rag fit only for white trash and totally devoid of any socially acceptable feature. I dream of that shirt to this very day. Somehow, I feel Cowboy and Old Gringo would understand.

It was hard to learn about women. There was no such thing as sex education in the 40s. No kid had direct access to Masonic ritual, the plans to the atomic bomb or nekkit lady information. Outside of Renaissance art and National Geographic pictures of buck nekkit women up the Orinoco river, nude females were a mystery.

Once camping, a kid unfolded a little piece of paper that was the insertion instructions out of his older sister's box of Tampax. We knew that somewhere on this tiny slip of folded paper lay the key to unravelling the entire mystery of human reproduction... But, damn if we could figure it out. We knew we had a schematic diagram of the unknown but we studied it like the Dead Sea Scrolls and came up with zilch. Not good for a future boat sailor. I would later learn how to read complex drawings and that the equipment we were trying to master could not be adequately understood from a piece of paper the size of a bubblegum cartoon. Life deals future sub sailors a lot of setbacks before you reach New London. But well, I'm wandering again... Back to the subject.

Bermuda is a place where a man can wear a totally tasteless shirt and fit right in. I can remember tourists wearing shirts that would make a vulture shoot his lunch.

I have ordered a catalog from a place called 'Paradise on a Hanger'. They sell "Aloha shirts"... "Aloha" is the Polynesian word for "Wild-ass, bark at the moon, totally tasteless."

(Editor's note - No one ever figured out how to use 'Dex Armstrong' and 'good taste' in the same sentence.)

These folks sell stuff you can only view through welders goggles. Radioactive prints of tropical flowers, bright parrots, pineapples, palm trees, even one with assorted surface craft... These people have elevated tacky tastelessness to a level only understood by blind Hindus, Zamboanga chief petty officers and smokeboat personnel. They even make them in 3X for lads who have spent a lifetime loading retirement rations.

The kid is going to get his socially unacceptable shirt and take his bouncing bride to an old liberty port... Drink a little rum and chase her around a two hundred dollar a night beach cottage. It doesn't get any more diesel boat than that.

(Follow-up editor's note - Finally figured a way to write the sentence... 'Thirty-five years ago, Dex Armstrong had the good taste to marry Solveig Nordvik in Hamar, Norway.')

Bubbles, The Goddess of the Main Induction

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Once you got your dolphins and entered the Brotherhood of the Bubbleheads, you were given the inner secrets of the society. Bubbles, Main Induction Goddess and Protector of the Homeless Boat Sailor, would listen to your prayers, answer embarrassing

questions and grant your wishes... All except wishes involving early liberty, a bunk that was yours exclusively and any questions involving fat girls with big tits.

The Goddess was beautiful and would not appear to officers, shore duty personnel, skimmers or non-quals.

"Oh, great and beautiful one... Tell me why some nuke boats are called 'boomers'?"

"Oh, unworthy, good-for-nothing, exhaust-breathing sonuvabitch, they are called 'boomers' because they haul stuff that goes 'boom'! Same rationale behind the reason the craft you ride is called a 'pigboat'... You smell like gahdam pigs!"

"Thank you, your most elevated highness... Thank you for the enlightenment you have bestowed upon the lowly, trash-hauling, paint-chipping professional topside watch... But dearest one, another question. How come in nuke movies and in Tom Clancy 'know-it-all' novels, the milk never goes bad? How come? Why don't you ever hear some sonuvabitch come through the control room and mumble, 'Gahdam milk's clabbered... Its bug juice and panther piss from here to the pier.'... Huh, oh, wisest one?"

"Oh, my simple-minded master of the wire brush and paint scraper... My paint-spattered idiot striker... Milk does not go bad because the nukes carry a 40 cow dairy herd in the after farm compartment, just forward of the prairie compartment. This not only provides an uninterrupted supply of fresh dairy products but in addition, gives men tits to fondle a long way from home."

"In a series of research experiments performed on board the USS Patty Wayne (SSBFN-One Potato, Two Potato) it was found that a nuke boat could trim itself by moving the dairy herd fore and aft... Thus eliminating the need to expend precious electricity or require surfacing for windmill drill."

"Again, thank you, oh generous one... Oh, source of enlightenment... The one true dispenser of subsurface truth and knowledge... Is it true that one called 'Cowboy', your dust-covered, rattlesnake-eating Crown Prince of Shitkickerdom and dispenser of wisdom had intimate relations with orphan desert donkeys that became his handmaidens...?"

"Is it true that Ray Stone has been instructed by you to visit every Hooters in North America to locate a temple to celebrate your holy days... The birthdays of Mr. Fairbanks, Mr. Morse, Mr. Sperry, Mr. Rand, Mr. Portsmouth, Mr. Groton, and old aunt Manitowoc?"

"Has Old Gringo been condemned for consorting and cavorting with known mental defectives via the cyber-electro orange juice cans and string... Has he been condemned to wander the vast expanse of Baja, California eating nothing but horny toad washed down with two-ex... In search of Coronado's golden rivet?"

"Yes, my disciple... These things you have mentioned are true... Olgoat, Cowboy, RamJet, Torsk Doc, Old Gringo, and a recently surfaced airdale calling himself 'Crackerbox', who is a self-admitted dabbler in unorthodox behavioral patterns with large numbers of pachyderms in lieu of additional commitment... These are true believers... They carry the doctrine of Smoke Boatology throughout the land. While O. J. visits all the known golf courses in search of the elusive fellow who dropped the bloody glove... My disciples visit all locations displaying neon Budweiser signs and tap handles, in search of wayward sheep that must be returned to the flock."

"You are wise as you are good-looking. Do you think you will be able to save Patty Wayne? Can he be salvaged? Can the wicked Hyman be exorcised from his soul? Can the evil influence that permeates his invective be banished and this most worthy individual returned to the fold?"

"Absolutely, it is written..."

"Goddess... Thank you."

"Dex... I now must ask you a question..."

"Fire away, oh magnificent one... Keeper of the flame... High priestess of low-cost suds and locator of lost peacoats... Ask anything you wish."

"Did you say, if Ray Stone chewed cow shit it would improve his breath?"

"No dearest, Doc Beeghly entered the temple of my soul and screwed with my trim manifold... I love Ray... Not the 'light in the loafers, Tinkerbell' kind of love... The kind a submarine sailor feels for any sonuvabitch buying beer."

And thus she disappeared, leaving behind the telltale hint of diesel fuel and the aroma of the number two sanitary tank inboard vent.

Foul Weather Gear by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

One great thing about having a DD-214 that has turned yellow and is coming apart in the creases, is that you can whine and the commandant of the local naval district can't jerk your chain.

Consider the following:

Foul Weather Jackets and Life Saver Belts:

Foul weather jackets soaked up salt water faster than a Stay-Free mini-pad. The suckers only made sure you were soaked, cold and miserable and that you had to dry your soggy Pall Malls on the radar console before you could light the damn things.

Life belts contained this weird 'hippie orange' contraption that you had to unfold and stick your head through to go on deck. The theory being if you fell over the side then...

(A) You would pull a little toggle... A gray wooden ball on a short line... Inflate the thing and hope the lookout saw you go AWOL and...

(B) The obnoxious color would help them locate you... Or the Birds Eye frozen slab that used to be you.

The problem was that in heavy weather, trying to maintain your footing on a slimy deck pulling a ten ton dog chain... One thing you could do without was a big orange thing flopping around all over hell and half Georgia, attached to your chest... Like wild sex with a parrot.

I attempted to satisfy this problem by putting on the fool thing and then tossing on my water absorbent jacket... This way if I needed to float, I would unzip the jacket and jerk the lanyard. A good idea became a very bad idea when the Chief of the Boat jerked my lanyard in the control room late one night and a rhinoceros appeared and tried to crush my rib cage.

Dog Chains:

Requin had dog chains with links forged from anvils. One step up would have been anchor chain. Whoever designed those things must have figured we used elephants to dump two-way... If one ever came loose and you went over the side, the last thing to see your dog tags would be a member of the crab family.

Foul Weather Parkas:

We had a foul weather gear locker in the control room forward of the I.C. board. It contained some of the foulest gear ever donned by free citizens... It was ripped and torn... This was a period in history where bluejackets knew instinctively that mere contact with a needle and thread would turn you homosexual, so unless healed by God, stuff never got any better... You just kept poking your arms around until you found the intended hole.

The stuff never got washed or sent anywhere to be cleaned. It took a real man to intentionally crawl into some of that stuff. Looking back, if given the option to pull on Requin heavy weather gear or wrap myself in a month-old bedsheet from a cot in a leper colony cathouse, I would have gone for the bed linen, hands down.

And it leaked through the neck hole, insuring that when green water came over the bridge, you'd enjoy the rest of your watch in ice cold soggy skivvy shorts.

Mittens:

What genius thought those things up? It's damn certain the idiot never tried to adjust the focus knob on a set of slippery binoculars in a storm. I often wondered if the same guy required naval surgeons to do their work in boxing gloves. On the positive side, they made it impossible to pick one's nose and could be stuffed up inside of a parka hood to keep your ears warm.

Gooloshers:

Jeezus, I would give a fortune to see the prototypical giant the navy created those modern miracles for... The sonuvabitch must have come sliding down a beanstalk. They had to have been size 26, two sizes bigger than a tractor tire... You could take three steps before the sonuvabitches moved. Two rights... Two lefts... One of each... Didn't matter. You just had to grab two and put 'em on. They only issued them so your toes could have a good swim.

The boats provided a place where a kid who spent his childhood with his shirt tail hanging out and his shoes untied, could feel at home... It was great.

The last time I saw Requin's foul weather gear was on CNN... Some skinny guy in a Yugoslavian P.O.W. camp was tossing it back in a Salvation Army collection box.

Lingerie Beneath the Sea CORRECTION!!

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

One thing about being an ex-smokeboat line handler and trash dumper... it's easy to admit to being wrong because less than five people in the known world expect you to be right... Once in a hundred. E-3s should not have opinions.

In my previous diatribe about women in the boats... Make that, the possibility of co-ed crews... In that piece I referred to the 'minaturized cajones' carried by the present leadership of the naval establishment.

I was 180 degrees out on two gentlemen... The CNO, Admiral Jay Johnson, and the Director of Naval Nuclear Propulsion, Admiral Frank Bowman. I owe these two gentlemen a world-class apology. They must feel like a pair of worn out salmon swimming upstream against the feminist torrent. God bless 'em both...

This isn't the first crow I've had to eat... And it sure as hell won't be the last... But, as crow-eating goes, this may have been the best tasting. There are too many 'go along to get along' folks in leadership positions today... So when you come across a flag officer with an oak heart and a steel spine, you have a national treasure... Find two, and there is a good possibility you can survive the 'go-alongs'.

Admirals Johnson and Bowman...

On behalf of a lot of us old worn-out boat sailors... Much obliged... Thanks from those of us who dealt specifically in petroleum-powered submersibles... Enhanced pride gives crew a great flavor. These two admirals make it great to be a bluejacket.

A lot of good sailors jumped down my smokestack with both feet on behalf of these two fine officers. One thing about diesel boat sailors, when you act like a stupid sonuvabitch, there's never a shortage of smiling faces to tell you how full of it, you are.

Captured Memories by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There are a lot of special moments that touch a boat sailor's heart... Intimate moments in time long remembered, that define us as what we were and remain to this day. We will carry such memories until our final sleep... Moments that can only be fully appreciated by the men who wore twin fish and went to sea in submersible ships.

This is the time of year when it seems fitting to reshuffle such images of the mind... Unlock those private moments and pass them around among ourselves.

Acceptance by your crew cannot be captured in a single moment but rather a daisy-chain of warm memories... Cups of coffee handed to you by a shipmate without you asking... Small... Unspectacular, but a moment of acceptance.

The awarding of a nickname... A handle by which you will be known for more years than you ever expected at the time... 'Wingnut', 'Fly', 'Big Red', 'Slick', 'Baby Huey', 'The Chinese Whore', 'Rat', 'Mack'... Every boat did it.

You come alongside a long way from home... Hundreds of miles from the disbursing office on your tender, where your pay records that control your pay are gathering dust... Nothing can flatten an E-3 wallet like a long-range pay record.

An old Chief named 'Dutch' grabs you and pretends to straighten your neckerchief knot as an excuse to shove a twenty in your jumper pocket.

"Gahdammit Dex, see that your running mates get a couple of beers."

The old bastard was the kindest man I ever knew. He wore Dolphins... Those big goofy-looking Dolphins that West Coast sub sailors got in Japan... Ugly as hell, but when you saw them, you knew the guy was far from being a new kid on the block. Had a Combat Patrol Pin and six rows of non-gedunk ribbons. Hard-core boat sailor with the pride that comes from plowing saltwater for more years than you had been on the planet. A big man in every way, especially in the heart... A man who never forgot how it felt to live at the lowest link in the Naval food chain.

The Old Man coming to the bridge, turning up the collar on a well-worn foul weather jacket with 'C.O.' stenciled in big letters between his shoulder blades, taking a good look at one of those million dollar sunsets... Smiling and saying,

"Gentlemen, damn fine night for a sailor... Red sky at night, sailor's delight."

Then he would pat his pocket like he was looking for an elusive pack of smokes... He never had any. We used to joke among ourselves that no pocket on the Old Man's sea jacket had ever seen anything containing cigarettes.

"Dex, what are we smoking tonight?"

"Marlboros' sir... Same as last night."

"Very well..."

He always knew where I kept mine and would fish one out, light up and fill us in on our op orders.

"Keep a sharp eye out... Cans will be out here poking around for us at first light. I'm going to pull a blanket over us next watch... Tell your relief."

"Aye sir."

"Good night, gentlemen... Like I said... Great night to be a sailor."

"Aye sir, great night to be a sailor."

Thirty-five years later, standing forward of the conning tower fairwater in Pittsburgh where the old girl has been dolled up and put out to pasture, I had the honor to stand next to the Old Man and enjoy our last sunset together.

"Great night to be a sailor, sir."

"Dex, they were ALL great nights."

He died a year later and if there's a submarine where he went, I hope the lookouts carry smokes and know they've got as good as they come.

On several occasions, we formed topside with the entire crew decked out in dress canvas... Damn, we looked sharp! Such a photo hangs on my bedroom wall... A gentle reminder that as Mike Hemming put it so well,

"It wasn't all a dream..."

No Mike, we lived it. Oh man, how we lived it!!

Then there were the goodbyes...

Funny thing about boat sailors. They figure if they say what they really feel, some wise-ass will accuse them of turning queer, so a sentimental goodbye for submariners goes something like,

"Goodbye you worthless bastard... As long as you've got a church key and a deck of cards, you'll make out okay."

Or...

"Take it easy Jack... Some poor lame-ass fishing boat probably needs a lousy cook."

There were nights you spent with damn fine men standing aft by the screwguards, watching the rippling effect of moon reflection in the current, daydreaming about the future.

"Think you'll get married?"

"I guess... Sure, someday."

"Gonna have a family?"

"Hell yes, gotta have kids."

"Anyone picked out?"

"Nah... What gal would get serious about some chronically broke idiot that disappears for weeks at a time?"

"A good woman can handle it.. A lot of 'em do..."

"Not that many good women around."

Like so many other things in life, I couldn't have been farther off base. One thing boat service taught us all... We know when we are in the presence of truly good women... And that it took such women to put up with us for the long haul.

No one ever turned you down for a standby when you really needed one... And I never saw a dime change hands over a standby. Small thing... But a big indicator of a tight crew.

Tight crew... We all knew that meant that any man on the boat would have piggy-backed any shipmate through the fires of Hell on any given day, simply for the honor of doing so.

I truly hope that has not been lost. Officers can be independent... Stand alone. not so, enlisted men. We had to lean on each other. We were the muscle and nerve system of those iron monsters. Without us, there would have been no functioning arterial system... We brought life to the boat.

By now, the world knows how full of crap I am about the Nuclear Navy. Sid Harrison has repeatedly jerked my drawers to half-mast and exposed me for the fraud that I am.

You nukes should take time to collect your moments and file them carefully away in a dark corner of your heart... Most certainly, you will want to retrieve them sometime way in the future, to share with your current mates in your twilight years.

And honor your enlisted naval heritage... I know, sounds like a load of crap... It's not. You got handed, through no personal exertion on your part, a heritage earned by good men and... Yes, good women... Who went before you. You aren't the first to Brasso brightwork, bucko.

That uniform... That impractical, Cracker Jack box-looking set of blues... The one with the flap that smacks you behind the ears on a windy day... The one with the stupid neckerchief that dangles in your soup, can be found in wooden boxes in the military cemeteries of the world. Men who ran out broadsides of eighteen-pounders from the gunports of wooden ships, wore the same outfit that's folded in your side locker.

More important, and probably more relevant to you, the boat sailors who crushed the Jap navy wore it and we who passed it on to you, wore it. That uniform and the Dolphins that look so good over your pocket, makes us brothers and allows us the credentials necessary to validate our right to jump down each other's smokestacks now and again, in fun.

None of your sister services has a 150 year-old uniform paid for in selfless sacrifice... Forget that and you diminish yourselves.

I'm not your gahdam mother... I am a has-been smoke boat sailor who knows he wouldn't make a proper pimple on the ass of a present-day submariner. But, having said that... I know we passed into your hands, an untarnished record that we have a right to expect you to maintain it in a condition that can be proudly passed to future contenders for the 'Brotherhood'.

Rest assured, there will always be the Sid Harrisons who will rise up and speak their piece when things are said or done that aren't in the spirit of what the sub service is... And should be.

But above all, don't let the moment get by. Take your slice of life from the middle of the pie and don't look back. Let the rest of the Navy scramble for the crumbs. You are 'bubbleheads' - boat sailors... You come from a long line of guys who whittled their names in some of the finest bar furniture on the planet.

Sid said it far better than I ever could. "Propulsion doesn't matter..."

Hell, they may be running boats off Kellogg's Corn Flakes in ten years... Betty Crocker may replace Hyman as God's gift to underwater warfare... They may find they can conserve electricity by turning off the lights and handing out Dolphins at the Lighthouse for the Blind... Who the hell knows.

But one thing is certain... There will always be boats and there will always be men who volunteer to man them... And there will always be liars who rode boats and love to dabble in the bullshit trade over a cold beer in the company of shipmates.

And with that, this old man should hit the rack... You have kept him up far past his bedtime. It's time for old coots to shut and lock eyelids, and dream of a land of big-busted girls, Viagra trees and blind shore patrols... Where rum and cokes go for a dime and Ray Stone has all the good phone numbers. Merry Christmas.

Ragbats and Running Mates by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

If you never were an enlisted man on a diesel boat, you missed good times God never intended for mere mortals to enjoy.

I've somehow managed to reach ripe middle age, not having been lynched, tarred and feathered, drawn and quartered, or burned at the stake... And, considering the boat sailors I ran with, that has to be a major miracle.

I ran with idiots who would flirt with the bull knowing full well we were about to receive the horn... We absorbed a lot of horns... (You have to use a lot of western imagery for remedial readers in Reno... I apologize, but Ray said we had to do that so we won't lose our Sesame Street grant.)

The Sea Lion was in our squadron. The Navy had done some major mod work on her so she could haul SEALs and marine RECON... We just called them 'frogmen'. Meeting SEALs and marine recon folks gave a sub sailor a good feeling... Instantly, you knew that there were things on the planet stupider than volunteering for the boats... You thought that, but never said it out loud unless you were 2 miles underground inside a lead-lined box in a Bulgarian coal mine. That is to say, you were very discreet unless you were Adrian Stuke...

God gave me a running mate that loved flirting with personal annihilation. The problem was, I was his idiot sidekick. I knew when the Lone Ranger, Cisco and Red Ryder took the grenade that Tonto, Poncho and Lil' Beaver were gonna take 'a lotta heavy shrap'. I did a lot of research and know beyond question, anyone who gets within twenty feet of the 'Pride of Quincy, Illinois' risks death, personal injury and being maimed for life.

One morning, the Sea Lion was loading recon marines... For those of you who have never seen a SEAL or recon marine in their natural environment, let me fill you in... During the mid '50s, the Navy found that if you concentrated nuclear radiation at a focal point one and three quarters of an inch beyond the eardrum, the human brain could be reduced to the size of a lima bean with complete loss of decent behavior, comprehension, rational thought processes, and severe vocabulary reduction. The process was extremely successful when the subjects bore a striking resemblance to hairy gorillas. They dressed 'em up... Swore them into the Marine Corps and sent them to Norfolk to ride the USS Sea Lion.

A truck arrived and from under the canvas top covering the rear bed, came the damnedest collection of knuckle-dragging sonivabitches the Divine Father ever put together on a bad day. They weren't happy... Have no idea why... Maybe nobody fed them raw meat on the end of a long stick for two days... Don't know...

It didn't take long to figure out that in recon training, marines are taught to travel light so they toss out all the adjectives in their lexicon and just use 'f*cking' for all occasions... And any recon that allows anything to grow on any skin surface above his ear line that can cast any kind of a shadow, is shot and shipped directly to the Spam factory.

On a good day, these poor abused bastards are unpleasant to be around... On a day when they are less than happy, they get damn near insufferable... And any sonuvabitch, who gets in the same zip code with them when they have been drinking, ranks two levels below a village idiot.

So, there they were... The devil's playmates... Hopping out of this truck... Looking like a tag team of professional wrestlers... Snorting... Mumbling... Each with a big black bag with big ol' gum rubber swimming flippers tied to it... Big triple-tank racks and wristwatches the size of a pickup's speedometer.

They grabbed their gear and started to cross over the boats in the nest to get to the Sea Lion, moored outboard.

I often wondered what the inside of the Sea Lion looked like... Had this mental picture of a giant compartment that passed the horny rodeo bull test, where they chained all the recon animals up. If I had been the COB, damned if I wouldn't have issued bullwhips. Now, back to the moment.

I wish I could paint you an accurate picture, but someone highjacked my Ernest Hemmingway gene on my trip down the Fallopian tube... All I got left with was a Mike Hemming gene... Meaning, I should be actually painting all this on the wall of a cave somewhere.

Adrian Stuke actually joined the Navy to give his dear mother all the time necessary to negotiate a deal with the governor of Illinois, whereby Stuke could return to Illinois and

not be shot on sight. The COB kept asking Adrian why he picked the submarine force... Then the COB would say,

"Why did God give us the two idiots Noah didn't have room for?"

When Dutch said stuff like that, you knew he loved you.

When 'Sneezy, Grumpy, Dopey, Doc' and all the other recons cleared our deck, Stuke dropped down in a line locker forward of the sail and yelled at the top of his voice,

"I'D RATHER HAVE A SISTER THAT WAZZA WHORE... THAN A BROTHER IN THE CORPS!!"

A sure-fire, two-line death wish.

Every sonuvabitch topside on every boat in the nest instantly got that 'It wasn't me' look. I knew there was no way we could convince those raw meat-eaters that God said it, so rather than point at the sky... I put on my straight dope face and pointed at the Orion. They weren't buying... So I quit selling... And immediately worked out a strategy to relocate to the wardroom. The exec would like to see me ripped in half, but would not feed any living human to the marines. There ain't anybody that gahdam evil.

While I am attempting to slowly make my way to the sail door... Whistling and doing my damndest to look serious and professional... And wondering if you could report into the receiving station in Hell with pants freshly peed in while being rapidly dismembered by irate recon marines... While all this was going on, I wondered if they would find my will in my side locker... I look down and grinning back at me through the slats in a line locker lid is Requin's Leading Seaman and Master of Unorthodox Behavior... The only man in the world that said for no reason at all,

"I wonder if anyone ever French-kissed a Great White Shark and got away with it..."

I on the other hand, was an absolute Four-Oh submarine sailor who suffered from a massive dose of guilt by association... Kinda like being Charles Manson's hand puppet. Does God count it if you lie to bigger liars than you are?

In truth, it was a lot of fun being the sidekick of 'The Legend'. But if I'd had only one ounce of gahdam sense, I would have grabbed a T-wrench, tightened down that locker lid and fed the friggin 'Legend' stale doughnuts through the lid slots for a week. Only my Christian upbringing kept me from waving at the nasty-faced guys on the Sea Lion who were engaged in yelling a lot of stuff I doubt their mother would have approved of, and pointing down to the grinning face inside the line locker and saying,

"Here he is... Have no idea who he is, except he hangs around the men's room at the Trailways bus station and follows sailors back to the Orion..." If I had, at least six of us would have gotten a Navy-paid trip to Arlington.

French Welcome by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Someone asked... "Why are you always saying, 'And we cussed everyone in France'?"

Long story... Have no idea if you can run out the statute of limitations on lying to French constabulary forces so the facts in this case must be handled rather delicately... Not that I will ever be returning to France... Not even if global warming makes it possible to drive from Charleston to Cherbourg. The only thing I could possibly want from France would be a pair of those Paris fashion ooh-la-la step-in bloomers for my bride. You know, those French 'If you can catch me you can screw me' ruffled lace drawers? Well, unless a crate of them turns up at Wal-Mart, I'm outta luck.

'F*ck the French' was the war cry of the 481.

Story goes... USS Requin (SS-481), God's gift of tact, diplomacy and polite interaction with diverse cultures, arrives in French port... Atlantic side... 'La'... You fill in the rest.

Requin is assigned a rather scenic anchorage where the entire skuzzy town can be viewed by anyone who wished to be able to tell future generations he had actually seen the rectum of the universe.

The town had a rather prominent sea wall. Once fifty feet of anchor chain rattled out just forward of the port bowplane, we had our first opportunity to view the scenic beauty of this French coastal dump.

In anticipation of our arrival, the good citizens had gone to a great deal of trouble to paint 'YANKEE GO HOME' in great big letters. It was fresh, so it appeared it had been produced specifically by the local Chamber of Commerce to welcome us.

Capt. Edward (No middle name) Frothingham, our skipper, got so mad the veins stood out on his neck.

"Those miserable, good-for-nothing, ungrateful sons-a-bitches!"

The captain was a class act. Whenever he allowed his anger to get the best of him, he would immediately control it and return to his quiet, professional demeanor...

"Gentlemen, one of the most terrible things about war... It takes the cream of a nation's manhood... Not the sick, the lame and the lazy... Not the type of worthless degenerate bastards who paint crap like that on a sea wall... War sacrifices the finest young men."

"France has fought two devastating conflicts in the first half of this century... Her good men fell in unbelievable numbers leaving the dregs of their society to regenerate her male population. I would like to think that if those good men were here today, we would not be forced to view that abomination for the next five days."

He dropped below.

Enlisted men are far less eloquent and a helluva lot more direct...

"F*ck the sonuvabitches."

There is a lot of controversy about what happened after sundown. I never subscribed to the 'Divine Miracle' theory. I am not a Catholic, so I have no real knowledge or intimate awareness of miracles, but it just seemed to me if it had Jesus' seal of approval, He would have chosen different words.

I subscribe to the idea that the Tooth Fairy did it.

I will give you the facts as I know them... Please keep in mind, none of this was ever sworn to within ten feet of anything remotely resembling a major religious text.

Someone at evening chow said something like,

"Wouldn't it be great to chamber one up Mr. Froggie's stern tube?"

As I recall, a lively discussion ensued, regarding the options of appropriate response... Then all the good little boys finished their milk and cookies and went promptly to bed.

Memory failed most of us the following day... You can't plead the Fifth Amendment in France... The Fifth Amendment's maximum stretch was from pier 22 in Norfolk to the Chesapeake lightship off Cape Charles. Once past the lightship, you had to find some other nail to hang your bullshit on. Nobody in Hogan's Alley had taken the navy correspondence course that led to a French law degree, so we had to fall back on 'stupidity', our 'fits everything' lifesaver.

The topside watch did not see anything... Said he heard metal clanking sounds aft of the sail at some point during the night... Heard what sounded like locker lids and something being inflated... Later, he heard what sounded like someone running an air compressor over in the direction of the sea wall... And from 2200 to just before dawn, a light breeze blowing from the sea wall carried an extremely strong odor of Methyl Ethel Keytone. That was the best he could do... The rest of us grinned a lot and looked about as stupid as human beings could look, on purpose.

Why was Mr. Frog cop interrogating us?

Sometime during the night, inconsiderate persons unknown had painted over their wonderful 'YANKEE GO HOME' sign... In its place was a giant #7 gray rectangle approximately fifty yards long with beautiful big white hull-number-sized shaded in black letters, ten feet high, reading 'F*CK YOU FROGS'.

At morning quarters, the entire wardroom expressed admiration for the change of view. The captain asked us to relay his compliments and well-wishes to the craftsmen involved if we happened to meet them on liberty... The officers actually took up a collection from the entire wardroom and the Old Man gave the deck force \$75 and liberty so they... Make that we... could go ashore, locate the painters and buy them a beer... And in the words of our skipper,

"If you can't find the guys who did that, buy yourselves a beer." And we did.

We told the French law enforcement official our best guess was that it was the handiwork of a Panamanian cargo ship that shoved off at dawn. Panamanians were the only folks we knew of that might actually consider reptile intercourse.

If you looked real close... Way down in the lower right-hand corner, some magic elf put '481 SUBRON 6'... A coded message.

Before the cop left, we gave him a cup of coffee and asked him if he knew where we could go and get a naked picture of Bridget Bardot for the Alley.

A Boatsailor's Angel by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Her name is Joy... She is the 'Tigerflower' of a previous tale in this endless, mindless linkage of nonsense. She married the other guy... Smart move on her part, unbelievable luck on his part.

Joy is the ideal of gentle womanhood. God blessed her with a radiant smile that lights up a room and instantly puts you at ease. She is happily married to a wonderful fellow who doesn't mind her staying in touch with an idiot sandbox pal of yesteryear... And she reads this stupidity on the installment plan.

Joy and her family regularly took in a stray dog boatsailor who turned up on her doorstep smelling like three weeks on the snorkel and hauling a bag of laundry that should have been burned or mailed to a sewage processing plant.

She fed this undeserving bum and provided a couch or clean sheets. She never understood what clean sheets and a hot shower meant to a single after battery rat.

I know that God has a designated place where the girls who took in orphans from the smoke boat service, fed them home cooking... Let them run up their hot water bills and sleep in real 'no bunk chains' beds. When you arrive in Heaven... That is if God doesn't hold smoke boat service against us... If we get there, Joy will be the beautiful angel parked on the fluffiest cloud.

First loves endure... The ones forged in the delightful innocence of youth... The ones where the girls were incased in multiple laminations of petticoats, smelled like flower

gardens and wore that 'get the stuff all over you' bright red lipstick. You have your vision of beauty of that period and I have Tigerflower. I wouldn't trade.

She was the first of what I consider to be close friends, to welcome my Norwegian bride to this country... That alone put me in her eternal debt.

I think she has long forgiven a twenty-year old idiot who stood an eight-hour maneuvering watch after a northern run and hitch-hiked through the night to attend her wedding. The unsuspecting kid who got loaded at the reception... Got knee-walking, commode-hugging blasted... Missed the tossed garter and called for her panties. Then, had to sober up enough to thumb rides back... To make underway quarters and load for sea Monday morning. He was young... Not too bright and needed a lot of forgiveness.

Thinking back, if the kid could have dropped down the after battery hatch and been able to toss a pair of lace panties on his bunk and say,

"Had a GREAT weekend!"

It would have eliminated a helluva lot of those,

"Hey Dex, how was your weekend?" inevitable questions.

Joy... The picture is for you. In the shape he was in, he would have probably missed your underpants, too



The Great Rat Roundup Days by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The largest rats I've ever seen (and I've seen a helluva lot of rats) lived in Norfolk Virginia at pier 22 Des Sub piers. They had rats you could have entered in the Kentucky Derby. Big, nasty rascals... They moved like the 1870 buffalo herds.

If you became the inboard boat in the nest, all lines to the pier had to have giant, sheetmetal rat guards on them. They looked like tin Chinese coolie hats. Once you doubled up your lines, you slipped the Chinese tin hats over them.

I once brought a Crossman pellet pistol to the boat. I figured that a little big game hunting wouldn't hurt and would help pass the time on the 12 to 4 topside watch. I filled the window ledge in the topside watch shack with three boxes of pellets and loaded my foulweather jacket with CO2 cartridges. I was nineteen... At nineteen, it is very important to perfect your fast draw... By 25, you have matured to the point where you

give up the possibility of ever becoming a circus acrobat, a Congolese mercenary or a western gunfighter... But at nineteen, you feel compelled to work on your fast draw.

However, for those of you needing to develop your pellet gun fast draw, a few pointers... First, practice on the side of the conning tower fairwater that cannot be seen by the quarterdeck of your tender. Why? Because at 0200 the blind sonuvabitches who inhabit a tender quarterdeck can't tell the difference between an issue model 1913 service 45 pistol and a J.C. Penny issue Crossman pellet gun... Actually, the kind of clowns they give the mid watch to in port (to include myself), probably would have difficulty distinguishing the difference between the main battery of the USS Missouri and a Red Ryder B.B. gun.

Around the time you are about to turn your fast draw on the pier's wandering herd, a J.G. appears to tell your OD, you are monkeying with your 45.

Never use your holster. To do this would require the removal of your issue pistol which comes under the 'Monkeying with your pistol' category.

No, the best idea is to employ the official mid watch rat shooter fast draw... The one where you stuff the barrel down the back of your dungaree pants or in your hip pocket. When you do this, you will hear all the rats yelling,

"Watch it... Requin has a hired gun!"

It also improves your image if you whistle the theme song from High Noon. Rats will immediately recognize you are not messing around.

You also need to work on your night shooter's flashlight fast draw. You need a coordinated, simultaneous pellet pistol / flashlight fast draw. All of the legendary pier rat night shooters have the technique down pat.

"Do not forsake me, oh my darlin'... On this our wedding day... Hey... Do not forsake me, oh my darlin'..."

Click... Pooosh!

"Take that, you four-legged, beady-eyed sonuvabitch."

The rat would do the triple flip, full gainer with a tuck... Hit the tank top and bounce into the scaloosh locker... Requiring you to fish out your handy dandy, multi-purpose electrician's knife and cut a notch in the watch shack's door frame... Then, you would look across at the boat outboard, smile and say,

"And that's the way it was, movin' west."

A lot of them... The clever ones looked like tiny Rickovers with raggedy foul weather jackets... That made it a helluva lot more fun.

"Do not forsake me, oh my darlin'..."

Click... Pooosh!

"Take that you beady-eyed rascal."

Doc Rohr used to say,

"I can't understand the fascination you idiots have for gahdam pier rats. The bastards carry a million diseases."

"Doc, we're ordained instruments doing the work of dedicated emissaries of public health advocacy."

"That's a crock... What you are, are a bunch of idiots who have no gahdam idea of what standing a proper topside watch looks like."

"Chief, that's harsh... Shooting rats increases our combat effectiveness. What if the Russians are training rats to attack our boats? What if Pier Rat Shooter becomes a new enlisted rate and to start up the rate, they make all the guys with a lot of practice, Master Chiefs? Doc, if that happens, I promise I won't bump you for your rack."

"Jeezus, did your mom turn out any other complete idiots... Or are you the only one?"

"Do not forsake me, oh my darlin'..."

When the Orion made a big stink about the poor perception playing with a pellet gun made, we substituted electrocution... We secured copper foil and an electrical feeder line to a knife switch in the dogshack. This way, we could give several rats the 'forward nest hotfoot' at the same time... The only problem being... Singed, smoking rats leave a lousy smell.

Fast draw was definitely the preferred method of rodent reduction.

By the way, they never went for the RSMMC(SS)... Make that 'Rat Shooter's Mate Master Chief, Submarine Qualified'... If they did, I'd bump Ray Stone for Toots.

Nobody Had to Come and Get the Idiot

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In the war movies... You know, the World War II submarine movies. The ones where officers wear their hats in the conning tower and the cooks are all good natured

Irishmen who say, "Gee whiz, fellas..." a lot and never seem to be cooking anything. In those films, there's always some teenage corpsman who can do kidney transplants and heart valve surgery from the instructions found in some paperback book he picked up at a yard sale.

How come you can hear them yell,

"Blow negative to the mark!"

Then, nothing. No one pumps anything anywhere and no one cycles the vents. Why? Were they so good they trimmed 'em on the surface? There's never any air trapped in a ballast tank that picks an awkward time to gurgle up like a rhino fart at midnight.

You know that the 'to' and 'from' trips to the secret Jap convoy staging base in Foosomarango Bay, in the Tappamafooso Straits has got to take a couple of weeks. No trash... No one-way... No stinking laundry... Compartments neat and clean and the crew talking to each other like the Walton's family. How did they do it?

Nobody making nasty comments about the coffee... No coffee cups all over the control room. When the boats surface, the surface conditions are right off a tourist poster... The moon illuminates all night targets. No ratty dungarees. Strongest words used by a Chief is something like, "Dag-nabbit..." or "Gee Willickers." Someone in the crew always gets a letter from home with a photo of a new baby in it. No one in the crew said,

"What an ugly kid. It looks a lot like his old man was that second class motor mac on the Cubera."

I watched all of the submarine movies as a kid... Saw 'em all. You name the movie and my butt was spot-welded to a third row seat. "Hey kid, you sit that close you'll ruin your eyes."

I was a stupid kid... I figured if you sat in the middle of the theatre, there must be stuff you missed. Sometimes, they had a 'live show' before the movie like Tim McCoy doin' ropin' tricks or watchin' Gene Autry draw his trusty 44. If that happened, they usually picked kids in the first through third rows for some interactive entertainment. I got roped by some unknown guy who turned out to be Monty Montana. Back in the '40s the movie distributors spirited their B-western kid's icons all over hell and half Georgia, promoting their cowboy image. I wondered when they did all their cowboying stuff... Not that I was an expert on cowboy's agendas.

Somewhere between wanting to be a G-man, fire house captain, locomotive engineer, sheriff of Dodge City, and a circus acrobat, I found out that I wanted to be a submarine sailor because blowing up ships when nobody was looking, seemed like a good thing to do at the time. For a kid with a closet full of quarter sticks, M-80s, bulldog salutes, and cherry bombs, blowin' stuff up for a living seemed like a great idea.

In the forties, the folks at the A&P store in St. Elmo, Tennessee, would fork over a penny for every cleaned and washed soda bottle you turned in. All you needed was a red wagon, a garden hose and a couple miles of highway full of 'pop bottle weeds'. In the pre-ecology days in the rural south, boys would hold pop bottles out the window in a moving car, where wind passing over the hole would make a sound that drove adults nuts. After less than a minute, your dad would yell,

"Give me that gahdam sonuvabitch!"

And toss your musical instrument out the window, into the 'pop bottle weeds'... Or when you finished a bottle of pop, you could roll down a window and see if you could bounce the empty bottle off something along the side of the highway... Signs... Mailboxes... Or little kids who looked like they might grow up and become cooks or Chief Petty Officers.

Operation Pacific... Torpedo Run... Torpedo Alley... We Dive at Dawn... Hellcats of the Navy... Men Beneath the Sea... I saw 'em all and thanks to Coke, Pepsi, Nehi, and Doctor 'Peep-eye'... And fathers and kids who tossed bottles in the days before littering was a criminal activity and recycling was popular, I became a bluejacket.

I was already stuck in the cobweb of naval recruiting propaganda at eight. When I reached fifteen and silver-tongued rear admiral Thomas M. Dykers, USN retired started laying his flypaper, I was a dead rascal. I had 'Take me to New London' indelibly written all over my ass.

Hell, if they had issued movie qual Dolphins, I would have had two sets before entering high school. I got so salty sitting in the dark at the Rialto Theater; I looked like Capt. Hornblower with dilated pupils.

I was a fish that the United States Navy took with extremely light tackle... Hell, I jumped into the boat and into the frying pan faster than any other dumb sonuvabitch that ever turned back a mattress or laid out his crap in a side locker, in barracks 142 at sub school.

Pin the Tail on the Donkey by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I don't know if this was typical of other boats or exclusive to Requin and/or SUBRON Six, but there was no subject out of bounds when we played pin the tail on the donkey. Nothing was sacred on the old 481. Guys wouldn't hesitate to tell you your mother was ugly.... Her cooking was lousy... Your sister belonged in a zoo... Your hometown was a dump... Your religion was a pagan cult, operated by the devil... Your dear granny was hooking at the Trailways bus station and that before you got Dolphins the Old Man would be pinning them on Hampton Blvd. shoe shine boys.

Life could get a little boring on board. If you could piss somebody off, it was entertaining. Sounds weird, but being on submarines was weird. Just take Boy Throttleman, Olgoat and Launcher Lary for example and you will understand. Getting to a shipmate was known as administering the 'red ass'... The old pink pooper routine... Lighting up your stern tubes. Read Rontini's BBS and it will be evident that boat sailors can bounce stuff off each other that could be lethal to the uninitiated.

Enginemen were the worst. They were a mile and a half ahead of whatever rate was in second place. Enginemen... Every damn one of them was beyond redemption and salvation when it came to the "I don't believe the sonuvabitch actually said that" personal insult. When enginemen die, they all get the express bus to Hell.

On our boat, John T. could drop the anvil on you in a heartbeat. One minute you could be sitting in the crews mess enjoying a cup of whatever the cooks were passing off as coffee and the next moment you were actually considering the options for ending John T.'s earthly existence.

The rules of common decency stopped at the pressure hull. From there on it was everybody protect yourself.... Sharks ate the timid... Strictly law of the jungle... Walk softly and carry a sharp harpoon.

Officers, God bless'em, never understood it. We had a J.G. who got cardiac arrest when a heavy hitting session broke out.

I remember a session that began in the crew's mess and went on for damn near a week. Looking back, it may have ranked as the most fun we ever had playing the red ass game.

We had a lad aboard who had two engineering degrees, had actually considered becoming a priest and was without a doubt the most intellectual E-3 in the navy. How a guy makes the quantum leap from priest to boat sailor is beyond me, but he did. He arrived with a thin skin and left with an armadillo hide.

One morning, greasy John.T. ventured forward. He pulls a cup from the rack, draws a cup of coffee, looks over at A.L. and asks the dumbest question ever asked,

"Hey professor... How come you Catholics pray to dolls?"

A.L. lit up... Within a week, the kid had laid the entire doctrine of the Catholic faith on every available ear. We could have become commissioned Cardinals. We seriously considered buying some of those elephant tranquilizer darts to shoot him and shut him up. After he figured he had converted the heathen horde, he piped down and conversation returned to tits, cars, the New York Giants, and the Chicago Bears.

Then John T. showed up and said,

"Your Eminence, word has it the squadron is looking for a boat to go north and punch holes in the ocean... Would you talk to your Mother Mary doll and tell her to tell God that the Cutlass ain't been anywhere lately?"

Ten minutes later Dutch told John T. if he mentioned dolls one more time he would wake up to find his tongue vice-gripped to his gahdam eyelids.

Doc Rohre by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

To the lads on the boat he was known simply as 'Doc'. Every boat had a Doc... Submarines were so small, they didn't rate full-blown physicians on par with licensed doctors in civilian life. We had independent duty corpsmen. They were good... And our little Doc was numbered with the best.

Walter R. Rohre took a lot of ribbing. He was 'quack'... 'Voo doo man'... 'Pill pusher'... 'Which doctor'. We laminated him with every name we could dream up. But when all was said and done, no one on Requin would have swapped Doc for a bag of gold.

Doc was 'old navy'... One of those guys who could honestly say he had wrung more saltwater out of his socks than most of us had sailed over... Passed more lighthouses than we had passed phone poles... Old navy... Old time submariner... Combat pin boat sailor.

We used to say that Doc rode boats when they whittled the pressure hulls out of oak trees and trimmed them by moving wheelbarrow loads of bricks fore and aft... The old flathat and hammock navy.

To Doc, the after battery rats were just another bunch of disrespectful, hormone-active idiots in a long line of kids he'd stitched up, taped up, fixed up, and watched grow up.

His office was the corner of a table in the crew's mess. He would bring in his paperwork... Pack his pipe... Light it and ignore the wise-ass comments. The obligatory smart remarks of crew members passing, heading forward or aft. Inside, Doc knew that we all respected him and the career the gentleman represented... For indeed, he was a gentle man.

His practice was a three hundred eleven-foot iron tube with eighty-odd potential patients. We brought him our injuries... Maladies... Hangovers and hangnails, and he pulled the proper remedy from his bag of magic tricks and cured us.

His timely diagnosis of my bad appendix saved my life... When they rolled me down the passageway following my surgery, a four-striper asked me who made the initial diagnosis. I said,

"Doc Rohre, sir."

"Navy doctor on Orion?"

"No sir... Boat corpsman."

"Well son... You may not know it but if it wasn't for your corpsman, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

"I guess I owe him a beer, sir."

"Son, you owe him your future."

That's heavy-duty obligation.

Whenever we had a World War II movie, we used to ding on Doc.

"Hey Doc... Was that the way it was when you, Bull Halsey and Mac whipped the Japs?"

"Why don't you idiots pipe down and enjoy your cinematic fairy tale."

He never bragged... Didn't have to. Anyone who ever had the honor of standing next to little Doc in dress canvas could inventory the hardware over the left pocket of his Chief's coat and erase all doubts of his wartime service. Walter R. Rohre was a sailor who hadn't missed a helluva lot of what naval service was all about. If he hadn't done it... It probably didn't need to be done. Doc was, and is, the genuine article... No one who ever knew Doc didn't get the feeling that he was in the presence of naval history. He was the no bullshit, no gedunk, hardcore boatsailor.

Doc looked on our nonsense and endless pranks with that old timer's disdain. To him, we were a bunch of 'rubber socks' boots. He had seen the likes of us come and go and knew that no matter how stupid and silly we were... The navy and the submarine service he loved, would survive. WE were fleas on the fanny of time and there would be another crop of idiots to contend with when we were long gone. It had always been that way. Sailors are transient parts of the history of ships, and the ships a transient part of the continuous history of the force.

As we grow older, we come to realize that.

I have no idea how many lads owe their future to the professional competence of Walter R. Rohre... He probably never kept count. But, I do know that I did.

So Doc... I still owe you that beer and in case I forgot to tell you... It was great riding Requin with you... And an old rubber sock is honored to call you shipmate.

Adrian Stuke, Ultimate E-3 by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There's an evolution to everything. Over time, things improve... Get more refined and defined. Adrian Stuke incorporated every clever, unorthodox, devious, weird, and stupid stunt ever pulled off in E-3 history... And thought up on his own a whole boatload of stuff nobody ever considered. The CNO declared a seventy-two hour, three section liberty the day he cleared the receiving station... And the Navy Band played 'Bing, Bang, The Witch is Dead' for two straight days.

The two of us were planning to hijack the tender... But he became a short-timer and we had to hang it up.

If God ever needed two guys to destroy civilization on the installment plan, Stuke would have planned it and assigned me all the jackass work. Together, we were one helluva handful... Just ask any Chief in SUBRON 6. We could get in more trouble in less time than any other two bluejackets in Arleigh Burke's Navy. It was a tough job, but somebody had to tackle it.

If they ever melt the Requin down, they will find Stuke's DNA in the pressure hull... And it would be easy to locate in hundreds of Southern Europeans rapidly approaching their fortieth birthday. He could spread goodwill at a rate only curtailed by his navy pay grade... America's Ambassador to the Seaports of the World.

Adrian Stuke would wake you up just to tell you, you were ugly.

He once caused complete bedlam on Pier 22. Rumor had it that some sailor had contracted TB or something and the squadron set up this portable x-ray contraption on the pier. Guys were lined up by crews... We were behind the folks riding the Cutlass. It was hot...

Nothing was happening.

All of a sudden, Stuke jumps up on the platform and yells,

"Okay... Listen up... We want all you gahdam Camel and Pall Mall smokers up front... We've gotta get you while the film is fresh enough to penetrate all that crap you've got in your lungs. Anyone smoking Kools or Kents, you go to the back... Anyone smoking that Bull Durham roll your own bullshit, just cut your throats and jump off the pier..."

It was about here that the power brokers off Orion hauled him down. It sure made standing in the hot sun a lot funnier.

The rascal from Quincy, Illinois made submarine life worth living... Didn't matter how low your ass was dragging on any given day, all it took was five minutes of one of Stuke's 'What a Bunch of Whiners' routines and you were okay.

In '62, when I got the honor of diving #2 sanitary tank... They got me in this stinky wetsuit and handed me this scraper thing. Just before they put me in the mask, I looked at my old pal knowing that we wouldn't share this glorious moment.

"Stuke, why me?"

"Dex, look at this as a possible great moment in boat service history. Who knows? There may be a big oyster in there with a big-ass pearl."

To know him is to love him... He has never been firmly anchored to the planet.

I understand the subvets are having some kind of shindig in Phoenix. The master wild man lives in Mesa. If you guys don't goat rope him and make his worthless butt show up, you are missing one helluva opportunity.

And tell him to bring Janie... His absolutely knockout bride. You'll love Janie... And tell her she still owes me an 8x10 of her in a skimpy two-piece.

Adrian Stuke... The best and the worst of the first hundred years of the submarine force.

Enginemen... God's Worst Creation by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Did you ever wonder why diesel boat enginemen all live to a hundred and five, and have to be terminated with sledgehammers? The forward and after enginerooms on smokeboats were what the EPA calls hazardous waste sites. They had germs roaming around in there the size of snapping turtles. Any engineman who could survive six months, developed a level of immunity that could stand up to anything below the level of a ground zero nuclear blast.

Take Mike Hemming. In the world of natural selection, Mother Nature would normally provide something that would eliminate something as ornery and socially maladjusted as 'Boy Throttleman'... But if a rattlesnake bit Hemming, the damn snake would die. Why? He was an engineman.

When we ran out of clean coffee cups on Requin, the cooks would send a messcook to the enginerooms to locate, round up and return the vast collection of cups that migrated there and never returned. When enginemen made coffee runs, it was a one-way trip for whatever the coffee went aft in... An engineman will drink coffee out of anything he can pour it into... Cup... Bean can... Band-Aid box... Left boot off a dead yardbird... Didn't matter.

I have collected cups in enginerooms that a cat would have covered up in a litter box. Enginemen identified which cup belonged to which snipe by the patterns of black, greasy fingerprints covering the outside of the cups.

A first class motor mac once handed me a cup containing what had to be a weeks worth of Beechnut chewing tobacco spit roaming around in it.

“Hey kid, when you haul your worthless ass forward, how ‘bout a fresh cup.”

“Sure... It’ll take a couple of minutes to wash out your cup.”

“What for?... Just run some water in to get the chunky stuff out and draw me a fresh one.”

‘Fresh one’ was an alien concept to a gahdam snipe... Just like soap... Razor use... And socially acceptable vocabularies.

Snipes lived in a world never fully understood or appreciated by their shipmates. In a word... They were by far, the weirdest of the weird. I have no idea where the Navy found the sonuvabitches... My guess was they had to turn over a helluva lot of rocks and they just crawled out hauling big tools.

They were the only creatures in any of our armed services who considered acceptable personal hygiene could be achieved by turning your skivvy shirt inside-out every three weeks.

On the plus side, they were, hands down, the least self-absorbed, most generous bastards that ever lived... To them, an empty beer glass was unacceptable. Whatever they saved on soap, blades and laundry money went to pay for rounds of beer and taxi fares to haul drunken shipmates back to D&S piers.

Knowing full well that it is a gross violation of the Torpedoman’s Oath to ever say anything positive about anything that ever crawled out of the lower flats on an enginehouse, I... Make that we... All knew that come anything from a bar brawl to a Mother’s Day collection, the first three guys in line would be throttlmen and oilers.

By the time Hemming crossed the brow and became one of the ‘Great Unwashed’ on Requin, Stuke and I had mastered the E-3 survival skills, could operate thirteen-button blues without peeing on the flap and were known as ‘The Two Idiots off Requin’ by every master-at-arms on Orion. Hemming is called ‘Boy Throttlman’ because he was operating Fairbanks Morse on Tench boats fifteen minutes after his mom tossed his Cub Scout uniform in the Salvation Army collection box. He was bossing guys old enough to have changed his three-cornered pants... He was studying maintenance manuals when his contemporaries were still reading ‘Little Golden Books’.

He took big-time heat, but teenage rock crusher drivers are as scarce as virgins in Little Rock. But he had the beer drinkers' tapeworm and ranked right up there on the enginemen's scuzzy scale... And he was ugly and came with the vocabulary of a sewer digger's cockatoo.

Flo married him... Could have been the victim of post-hypnotic suggestion but she loves the unrepentant rascal. Being married to Flo would redeem the worst sinner and probably did.

Teamwork by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

'Teamwork' might well be the most overused... Most misunderstood word in use today. Most people are never afforded the opportunity to witness true teamwork in its purest form.

We have. Every man who wore Dolphins knows what being part of a highly trained eighty-man team is like... Eighty men functioning as one to achieve an objective... No hotdogging... No stellar performers... No signing bonus... No individual headlines. It was always 'The crew'... 'Ship's company'... The men... The lads... My boys... Collective terms.

You live together... You work hard together... You pull liberty together... You toss down suds together... Same bar, same men... And yes, if need be, you die together, as witnessed many times.

When you are taken into a crew, it is the ultimate package deal. You will be forever identified with the history of a ship and everyone honored to serve in her. That gentlemen, is what riding the boats gave us in exchange for a big chunk of each heart that beat behind Dolphins.

You could have signed up for a cushy job in the Podunk National Guard issuing socks and jocks... But you didn't. And in so doing, you became my brother.

I have no right... No logical explainable reason to feel a strong kinship with the magnificent folks who sit up nights tossing transcontinental bricks at each other on Rontini's cyberspace gotcha-go-round... But dammit, I do. That was the gift the U.S. Navy gave me for being taken into the team... And horsefly, the Navy gave it to you.

There are officers who wear heavy duty hardware who will tell you in no uncertain terms that it represents the work of eighty men.

I had both the pleasure and honor of meeting Capt. Eugene Fluckey, a gallant officer if ever there was one. It was at the submarine celebration of the 50th. anniversary of our victory in World War II.

I said, "Sir, that medal said it all."

"Son, I wear this medal because the crew lets me. The only thing I ever won on my own was a freckle contest at a local department store when I was a kid."

That statement was a true submariner representing the best of what service in submarines is all about.

Teamwork has a beginning but no end.

A while back, a lady made a posting on Rontini's magic carpet that went something like this;

"You should have known my dad... RM1(ss) Willie Wonka on USS Pimplefish out of..."

I did darling, and hundreds just like him. Unlike you, I had the privilege of smelling his stinking socks three weeks out... We shared oil slick coffee, riding heavy seas. I dropped by his rack when he was under the weather to see if he needed someone to stand his watch. After a Little Orphan Annie mail drop when your old man was running all over the boat showing off your baby picture, I told him "You were the ugliest kid I had ever seen." and he pulled my watch cap down over my eyes and planted a Mammy Yokum boot in my butt. I left overlapping beer glass rings on many tables with him and would have fought like hell to be first in line if the sonuvabitch had ever needed a pint of blood. And when he checked into the Big Receiving Station in the Sky, I was one of the six ugly guys who left the cemetery and hit a local bar, and sat up to 3:00 AM telling sea stories on him. He was submarines and I knew him... We never met sweetheart, but we all knew him.

When you are a true team, you don't go home at night... You take the good and the bad in stride and you always know you're not in it alone. Any other use of the word 'TEAM' is pure bullshit.

Blackbeard the Smokeboat Snipe by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

When Flo Hemming dies, God will put her in the express lane to Paradise... This poor lady has had all the hell on earth that God assigns to any one human being. You see, Flo Hemming is the lovely lady Mike Hemming, a.k.a. 'Boy Throttleman' hypnotized into marriage... No parole... No time off for good behavior. Hell, Flo could shoot him and do less time.

Flo has never taught Mike the intended concept of sleep. The idea that God created night and day for specific purposes and that the dark part was to be spent putting a download on a Serta.

At reunions, there are always five or six long-range liars who hang around the bar in the hospitality room, unloading load after load of historically inaccurate horse manure... And putting a helluva dent in the 'toss the hat' liquor stores. Like injured race horses, the only way you can put Hemming down is to blow a hole in his head with a large caliber handgun. When senior Hemming starts consuming brewed products in multiple can increments, there is a resulting rapid erosion of truth. After twelve or so cans, Mike will swear to the historical accuracy of Dr. Seuss.

At the first Requin reunion, I felt that I should stay up and drink with the heavy hitters. Only in the ensuing years I had learned when to switch to Pepsi and when to say 'to hell with it' and toss my car keys on the roof. I stayed up until a drunk ran down the corridor in white hat and skivvies yelling,

"Take her down to six-five feet and report yer leaks..."

Followed by two guys yelling,

"Paint locker, manned and ready!"

Anticipating the not too far off arrival of the local Gestapo or guys from the local asylum with nets... I gathered up my confused Norwegian submariner's wife and went to our room... The one Bob Garlock put me in right next to some sonuvabitch who checked in with a dog that could have easily qualified for the Budweiser beer wagon team. Damn dog barked all night and every time he barked, a couple of fillings fell out of my teeth.

When we got back to the room, I found that my innocent foreign-born bride was wide-eyed shocked. She had been listening to Mike Hemming and was trying to deal with the revelation and discovery that she was contractually cohabiting with a perverted heathen.

"Darling, Hemming lies. Don't believe a word the sonuvabitch said."

"Sweetheart, there is no such thing as a six-story cathouse... And if there was such a place and I jumped out of a six-story window with a nekkit blond... I would be dead... D-E-A-D... Deader'n hell."

"No, no one ever had to use a high pressure hose to get me out of a tree."

"Mom, Hemming is a master bullshit artist... He and Stuke... When presented with a choice between truth and fabricating something out of ten pounds of pony shit, will go for the pony crap every time."

"No, neither of them ever developed an appreciation for what became known as the concept of sleep... They never figured out that the Lord's original idea of dividing the day into two sections of 12 hours was so tired bastards could sleep."

"Dex?"

"Yes, sweetpea?"

"Did you ever make love to a zebra?"

"Who'n the hell told you that!?!"

"Mike Hemming."

"Darlin', I could go around this hotel and round up a couple of hundred sworn affidavits that Mike Hemming hasn't been closer than five miles to the truth in ten years."

Hemming doesn't care whose reputation he flushes down the ceramic dumper.

I love Mike a.k.a. 'Boy Throttleman'... Proud to call him shipmate. Love Flo... Maybe someday this lovely lady will knock off Mike's rough edges and file his horns down enough to turn him loose in polite society.

Mike lies. I, on the other hand, only deal in the gospel truth... Never prone to exaggeration or concocted horseshit. I should be writing Little Golden Books for kiddies.

Hemming lies... But all the stories told on him are true. He is a totally unrepentant corrupting influence who needs salvation in the worst way. When he was assigned to the Carp, they say he tossed his seabag over the brow, saluted the colors and the quarterdeck and said,

"What the hell is 'C-A-R-P'? Don't you idiots know how to spell crap?"

Mike, if you are reading this, know we love you and after your invitation to the Carp get together, I spent the better part of a month pulling your harpoons out of my butt. Consider this a love note... Kind of a belated Valentine... A big, wet kiss from Stuke and Dex.

Inane Conversation by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

"The evening meal is now being served in the crew's mess. Tonight we are serving pork chops... Savory green beans... Mashed potatoes and tossed salad. Seating in five minutes."

"Hey Jack, what's for dessert? You didn't mention dessert."

"You'll have to settle for a brown speckled banana... Or canned peaches. Mac and Stuke did a job on the last of the strawberries and the clowns who watched last night's flick got into the night baker's brownies and wiped 'em out."

"Jeezus H. Christ! What ever happened to self control, discipline and gahdam consideration of others? This rust bucket has to be populated with the most one-way bastards in the fleet."

"Get off it... John T., who sat there last week and indulged himself on a couple of dozen gahdam cookies as they came out of the oven?"

"What's the flick tonight?"

"Cattle Queen of Montana, starring Barbara Stanwick... For the fifth time."

"Barbara Stanwick is older than my granny... I'll bet the guys on the Cubera aren't watching tired-ass movies. They get Natalie Wood and Jayne Mansfield while we watch some old, over the hill honey and a bunch of worn out cows."

"Why don't you work a swap? You could swap with any other worthless idiot on the 'Cubby Bear' and we'd have to get the best of THAT deal."

"Blow it out your seabag."

"Jack..."

"Yo, babe..."

"You ever get that worthless Ford of yours running?"

"Yeah... Replaced the battery."

"I'll go in on gas if I can catch a ride to Philly when we get to go over."

"You got it. Halfers on gas and beer."

"Deal."

At sea, the conversation didn't improve.

"Who's got the planes?"

"Armstrong and Stuke."

"Somebody tell the idiots to pay attention. The sonuvabitches keep cycling the head valve... Bubbles are coming out of my gahdam eyelids and they are slopping water from

the deep sink all over hell and half Georgia. Somebody give the diving officer a bullwhip to use on those guys before my colon inverts."

"What are we runnin' at?"

"Periscope depth or just below... Somthin' like that. It ain't gettin' hot so they haven't secured the flappers. Go below 150 and they always set Condition Baker and call for leak reports."

"Why do they still call it 'Condition Baker'? Why not 'Condition Bravo'? Baker went out with World War II."

"They built these worn out bastards in World War II... Maybe that's why. Who knows? Better than that, who gives a damn?"

"Jack... You know what's wrong with you? No gahdam curiosity."

"Well lad, if you're so gahdam concerned, why don't you write to Arliegh Burke and ask him? 'Dear sir, I'm a worthless sonuvabitch in SUBRON SIX and I'm losing sleep over why we are setting Baker instead of Bravo... It is adversely affecting my ability to operate wire brushes and chipping hammers. Please write me and satisfy my intellectual curiosity, since I am sure you have nothing better to do. Love, Dex... Your next rotation messcook.'"

"How did I get on a boat full of brain-dead idiots?"

"Hell, you should feel right at home, horsefly."

"Fritz..."

"Yo."

"You live in Wisconsin... You get home much?"

"Not really."

"Your folks raise cows?"

"Sure do."

"What's so damn difficult about raisin' a bunch of cows? All they do is eat grass all day. I've seen cows... They don't seem to be doing anything but standing around eating grass and pooping... What the hell is so hard... Fitting the sonuvabitches in the hamburger grinder?"

"We run a dairy farm... We start milking at zero dark thirty."

"You should switch to hamburger-type cows... Looks like those guys are working a racket."

"Murphy, what do your folks do?"

"My old man owns a Dairy Queen."

"A Dairy Queen?"

"Yup... Draws more teenage gals than any other place in town."

"How does that work?"

"You'd be amazed what a summer of free Dairy Queen frozen custard can do for your love life. I could tell you stories that..."

'Set Condition Baker... Rig for deep submergence... Secure the bulkhead flappers... Watertight doors... Report all leaks. Say again, rig for deep submergence.'

"Here we go girls... Better head to your compartments. Toss those cups in the sink when you shove off."

"It's going to be a long, hot night."

Adjusting the Screwguards by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The animals used to gather aft in the vicinity of the screwguards, drink coffee, discuss various intellectual topics and solve world problems. Things like the long range ramifications of global breast development... Stocking suspension systems... And other subjects of vital importance to mankind.

We would gather for these after evening chow summit meetings because the first guy topside after chow would plant his worthless butt on the after capstan. There was some kind of mystical magnetic attraction between the after capstan and worthless butts... Especially E-3 worthless butts.

In port, raghats could stow a couple of wooden orange crates. The officers were issued butts that conformed to the configuration of the nice upholstered chairs in the Orion. The lower pay grades received asses specifically designed by God to fit wooden orange crates. This is a little known physiological fact... Just like all girls from Nebraska come with a John Deere tractor ass... Big fannies with dimples strategically placed to fit the ventilation holes drilled in the seat.

(Don't let anyone say that Ray Stone's 'Scurvy Skivvy Sack' isn't informative and educational.)

Orange crate furniture dragged topside out of the superstructure increased your I.Q. and like Ron Martini's BBS, made you an authoritative expert on any subject... Didn't matter... World politics... East-West arms negotiations... Snead's golf stroke... Surgical procedure... Mantle's fielding technique and speculation on what a weekend of sexual promiscuity with a variety of movie stars would be like... Also wondering how often Ike checked out Mamie's under rigging. You name it and the 'Requin E-3 Screwguard Council of Serious Stuff' discussion group could render contemplative judgment... Judgment known indelicately in some circles as totally uninformed bullshit opinion.

We used to look out over the Elizabeth River and Craney Island. The Elizabeth River was proof that Mother Nature could liquefy filth. The only difference between the Elizabeth River and the Ganges in India was that there were adverse legal consequences that keep folks from tossing the putrefying carcasses of animals into it... And the ashes of dead Hari-Krishna believers. But then, the entire 'in port' representation of the Second Fleet didn't blow their shit tanks in the Ganges before sunrise every morning.

The poor fish in the Elizabeth River had long ago forgotten what it was that God had intended for their diet. Local anglers all knew that if you wanted to reel in the limit before 10:00AM, the bait that was best was a combination of semi-decomposed head paper and a Texaco station tampon.

The Elizabeth River gave ecologists cardiac arrest. Anyone who ever saw it, understood immediately why Norfolk was known throughout the entire maritime world as 'shit city'. There was so much crap floating around in the river that after a carrier came in, it took three days for the wake to close in.

I heard that when some guy on the Carp qualified and they ceremoniously tossed him over the side, he hit the surface and bounced up on the deck of the Redfin. I didn't actually see it, but the story was going around in Bells... Ray Stone's version has the kid passing over Redfin and two other boats in the nest, and landing in the morning quarters formation of a Fletcher class can... I'm not convinced... Ray lies every now and then.

Coffee consumed after sundown in the glow of the stern light is the best you get... Especially when you share the times with boat sailors while you wrap yourself around a couple of cups.

"Hey Dex, you think we stand a chance of goin' somewhere decent next run?"

"I doubt it... But then it depends a helluva lot on what you consider decent."

"Jamica... Rio... Montevideo?"

"Fat chance, Kemosabi..."

"Why not?"

"Horsefly, you're riden' diesel boats... No glamour... No showboats... And you'll be damn lucky if you put into a place with cold beer and usable fuel hose fittings."

"Anyone short of smokes?"

"Yeah... Had the duty last night. Used up the last of my sea stores this afternoon."

"You're covered..."

"Did the geedunk truck come down to the pier tonight?"

"Sure did... Came about an hour ago."

"Who went over tonight?"

"Jack... John T... Fritz... The Twins... Hobo... And two or three others."

"You think Nixon will take Kennedy? Seems like Nixon will put the wood to Kennedy... Least that's what it looks like in the After Battery."

"Don't count the little mick out... He's a politically savvy little monkey. His old man damn near invented inexhaustible wealth... Besides, the sonuvabitch was navy."

"So was Tricky Dick... He was a public information officer in the navy."

"Sounds like WAVE work to me compared to Kennedy."

"Hell, Jack's a good looking womanizing lightweight... With a lot of cash."

"Bears and Giants... Anyone want the Giants for ten?"

"Yeah... Y. A. Tittle, Sam Huff and Andy Robestelli for a sawbuck."

"The Bears will go through 'em like fat through a duck."

"Bullshit... Don't spend my ten."

Conversation over coffee... A pow wow of the clan... The forming of life-long friendships. Moments in time, long remembered... Moments recaptured years later.

Someone sent me an e-mail and wanted me to tell his wife what being a submarine sailor was like. I have tried to do this with these stories. I wanted to show what submarine service... The smoke boat service was like to a kid at the absolute lower end of the responsibility anchor chain... The 'After Battery Rat' was the social equivalent of the 'untouchables' in India... The folks who carry everything they own in shopping carts and live in discarded refrigerator crates.

Nobody in his or her right mind, should ever put any weight behind the personal opinion of an E-3. If anyone does, they should immediately see a doctor and check out the level of his or her brain deterioration. Informed opinion from diesel boat non-rated personnel is rarer than hobbyhorse manure.

It started with some idiot drawing a cup of coffee after evening chow... One of the Rats that called the after battery home. He'd draw a cup from that all night stuff perking in the urn and head topside.

"Where you goin', Stuke?"

"Goin' topside to adjust the screwguards."

Jack In The Box by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Someone recently sent me a post. "Dex, when are you going to get around to sonarmen?"

Got me to thinking about the guys with the magic ears.

We had Jack Schneider. Long, lanky cowboy from Arizona. Always wore cowboy boots. Hell, he wore the damn things for dress canvas inspections topside... I've seen those damn boots hanging out of his rack when he was asleep. I never saw him take a shower... He probably wore 'em in there. He could have wooden toes for all we knew... Never saw the sonuvabitch out of those block heel boots.

Jack smoked roll-your-owns on purpose. He did it when the COB was still selling nickel a pack sea stores. He always had a string with a Bull Durham tag hanging out of his dungaree pocket. And a twisted tamale-looking butt hanging out of the side of his mouth... The things turned the tip of his mustache yellow.

Took him damn near forever to tell you something. Slowest talking man I ever knew. Would have taken him ten minutes to have told you an atomic bomb was falling on you. Jack never had a sense of urgency about anything... A man completely devoid of pressure. Life just took place without Jack's help like it was supposed to. Jack just saddled the available horse and let it take him wherever it wanted to go... Didn't seem to matter. Jack invented 'laid back' and elevated it to a point one step below embalming.

God gave Jack one helluva set of ears. He could be off Iceland and hear tick farts in Philadelphia. He knew what leprechauns sounded like when they were having sex and angels sounded like when they scratched their tiny butts. Jack could hear sounds nobody ever heard. He could give the Old Man screw counts on ships in some other ocean. He was amazing.

Whenever we were in some exercise where they were hunting us and the sonarman on duty was having problems identifying certain noise levels, the Old Man would send for Jack.

"Go rack out the ear wizard."

Jack would come into the control room wiping sleep from his eyes.

"You call for me, sir?"

"Jack, crawl down in your hole and let me know what's out there."

"Aye, sir."

Jack would lift the lid on his box...

Sonarmen had this clubhouse below the control room walking deck. You entered through a hole with a hinged lid. The entrance hole was between the bow planes operating gear and the hydraulic manifold. The hole let the sonarmen drop down into what we called 'the box'. When you peered down there, it looked like someone had crammed Frankenstein's lab into a freezer crate. All sorts of lights and dials and wierd electronic monkey business linked with ten thousand miles of interconnecting cable... With just enough room for a sonarman if he didn't have a fat wallet. They put dead guys in boxes bigger than sonar shacks and dead guys smell a helluva lot better than diesel boat sailors. The bathrooms in recreational vehicles look like Wall-Marts to sonarmen.

Jack would crawl down in his magic box hoping the methane effects of the evening meal's lima beans didn't kick in, and go to work. Then he'd pop up like a 'Jack in the Box' and say,

"Cap'n, ain't navy... Some whompin' contraption out there crossin' astern... Gotta be some tired-ass merchant... Screws all dinged to hell and she needs work on her strut bearings... Sounds like the dumptruck of the seas... Ain't navy, that's for damn sure... Least it ain't OUR navy... How 'bout a black n' bitter for a workin' man?"

And the lid would close.

All boat sailors had something going. Jack would hand tool leather. Made pocketbooks, wallets, pistol holsters, knife sheaths, and real neat belts. Listening to crap through a headset left your hands free. Jack made great hand-carved delicate designs in leather. Had all kinds of punches, carving knives, patterns, dyes, and pieces of leather. The sonar shack on Requin smelled like a shoe repair shop. Every officer's wife had a hand tooled purse and a nice belt... Most of the chief's wives had the same... Cigarette cases... Check book covers... Old slow-talk magic ears made them all. Every E-3 lad had an ID and liberty card folder with dolphins and laced edges... Very salty. Being salty

took a lot of concentration when you were able to see boot camp not that far behind you and your white hats aren't soft yet.

Small note: For sailors who may be reading this idiotic nonsense and are in their first enlistment, you are not Navy until (A) Your white hats get soft, you put wings in them by folding down the sides and cocked down over one eye or wear them on the back of your head. (B) You toss out your boot camp issue official genuine bonafide navy neckerchief, that thing you stuck a dime in and rolled up like three feet of garden hose, go out and buy a flat pressed 'greasy snake' and wear it with a knot an inch above the 'V' in your jumper. (C) You come to realize that chief petty officers are not God's direct representatives on earth. This will dawn on you the first time you find one face down drunk and you have to get him in a cab and back to the boat. And last, (D) you know what it feels like to be three sheets to the wind, standing on a pier in a place you've never been before and will never be again, wondering what the hell you did with your raghat, drinking stuff out of passed-around bottles, and singing songs that would make your mom shoot you... The stuff in the bottles could be fermented pigmy piss for all you care... And the launch lays alongside... And the cox'n yells,

"Okay girls, it's late and I don't intend to put up with any shit from you f*cking idiots!"

And you help men with whom your heart will be forever linked, in the boat and head 'home'.

That's when you're Navy.

Where was I? You get older and your mind wanders... Oh yes, sonarmen.

They tell me sound carries better in water than air. I've always taken their word on that. Being an E-3, you took a lot of people's word on stuff.

Once, Jack patched underwater sound into the conn when I had the helm. There was the damndest racket going on somewhere out there in the ocean.

"What the hell's that, Jack?"

"Carpenter fish."

"What in the hell is a carpenter fish?"

"Nobody knows... Never figured it out. Sounds like the bastards are building a house."

"That's why they call 'em carpenter fish?"

"Dex, you're a gahdam genius."

I'll bet the nukes figured 'em out... They've got stuff nowadays on those whomping big iron rascals that can give you the nipple size on a mermaid tit.

All sonarmen... Real honest-to-God sonarmen, have magic ears. That's why cockroaches on smokeboats passed notes and never whispered important stuff to each other.

Heave Out and Trice Up by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

"Reville... Reville... Heave out and trice up... Smoking lamp is lighted in all authorized smoking areas. Rise and shine, morning glories... Up and at' em. Drop your cocks and grab your socks... Move it ladies. Chow is being served... C'mon you ugly bastards, MOVE IT! I'm not issuing personal invitations. Let's hear feet hitting' the deck. Okay darlings, I want to see some activity... Hot coffee... Another day in Arliegh Burke's Canoe Club... C'mon you mattress-back sweethearts... MOVE IT!!"

"Chief, you whack me one more time with that gahdam clipboard, I'm gonna feed it to you."

"Knock off the bullshit and crawl out from under that blanket... NOW sweetie, not next week."

"Chief, did you have a mother, or did you just crawl out from under a rock?"

"Stuke, you can do better than that... Hit the deck... I haven't got all day."

"Don't bother me Chief, I'm in the middle of a dream... Nothin' between me and the cold, cold ground but a skinny blonde."

"You wish... Move it Bucko and let the boys in Ohio take care of your skinny blonde. Isn't she the one with buck teeth and a glass eye?"

"Screw you Chief... You and the horse you rode in on."

"Boy, that's original... Knock off the bullshit and roll your worthless good-for-nothing butt outta the rack."

"I wanna go home... I don't like the navy... No one told me it was full of mean, loudmouth lifers... I wanna go home... My mommy needs me."

"I heard your mommy broke your plate and burned your picture."

"Nice talk Chief."

"Roll out! I'm tired of screwin' with you hard cases... Start seperating yourself from those flash pads... Do it ladies... Everybody outta the pool... Chow time."

"Anyone seen my left boot?"

"Armstrong, when are you going to learn to keep track of your gear?"

"Chief, there's a thief in here... The sonuvabitch stole my left boot... The one with zinc chromate all over it."

"There's a lotta thieves in here... Especially the ones controlling a side locker full of canned peaches."

"Got it wrong Chief... That's a fringe benefit of being in the stores loading party. Deck Force, Chief... Deck Force Cumshaw."

"Bullshit, you one-way bastards... In The Old Navy somebody would have punched your lights out."

"The Old Navy? When was that Chief? Was everyone in it as ugly as you?"

"Just what the Boat Service needs... More smart mouth comedians. Beautiful day topside, girls... Great day for chipping hammers and paint scrapers."

"Chief, when is the relaxing, sit on your ass day scheduled? You know one of those sit in the after battery, drink coffee and bullshit about the good ol' days in The Old Navy... You know, ones like you and the other Chiefs have every day?"

"When you shipover five or six times, horsefly."

"Shipover?... You on dope?"

Mornings alongside... Lovely moments in time... Sweet, gentle, convivial mornings with personalized wake up calls... Where The Navys' finest greeted the blossoming day.

"Armstrong..."

"Yeah Chief?"

"You need to visit the laundry truck...I can smell you from here."

Emily Post never passed a pressure hull.

How to Steal Heaving Lines by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Everyone is giving away Cold War secrets and I got to feeling left out. I thumbed through my mental submarine secrets locker and came up with some topside master thief techniques.

Do boats still use heavies? Hell, they probably come alongside and activate big electromagnets or some kind of hydraulic coupling contraption... Damn things have no walking deck. You would have to be a national logrolling champ to walk fore and aft topside. For all I know, they don't even have a deck force... Hell, Earl Schieb may paint 'em when they come in.

In the old 'Six five feet and report your leaks' navy we had mooring lines. For those of you practitioners of poopysuitology who may still use heaving lines, I offer this as a diesel boat hand me down.

To begin... For those of you out there who never stood on a wet deck, standing there waiting to toss over your lines to some half awake idiot on the pier... Here's how it went.

At some point this side of the Chesapeake Lightship, the old man got his nest assignment. Last boat in usually drew an outboard assignment... Slipping boats into the middle of a nest was hell on ballast tanks. Did it a couple of times, but they were exceptions.

When the skipper got his pier and nest assignment, a call went out for deck force topside and you made your way topside hauling 'T' wrenches, to pop open the line locker lids. Smokeboats had four line lockers... Brest lines fore and aft and two sets of lockers for amidships spring lines.

You popped open the lockers and folded back the lids. The lines were coiled around four stationary pipes welded to the pressure hull. You pulled out the lines and 'faked' them down topside. Requin used 3-lay hemp hawser... I love the smell of wet hemp in the morning... Smells like... Victory... It's a deck force memory.

People take pride in their rates. Many of them were never deck apes... I was. Everyone takes pride in something. I guess even a good sewer digger takes pride in a well dug sewer.

I studied deck-avery under Adrian Stuke...The man knew topside like the inside of Lucy's bloomers. When it came to marlinspike seamanship and topside and bridge gear, the Stuke-ee-man was as good as they came. Requin was a goodlooking boat and Adrian Stuke deserves the credit. We goofed off...There are epic tales of our goofing off... We raised the standard of naval screwing around to heights never envisioned in the annals of submarine history.

But topside never suffered. We owned it. We kept the old girl dolled up like a hundred dollar call girl. If she was a painted lady, we were the bastards who handled her cosmetics. MEK and number seven gray... Over zinc chromate.

The old man never returned to a lousy looking boat the day following a night when we tied up. We painted her under the lights... Over the side in paint punts... Sucking smoke from the first night in battery charge. The last thing was to mask and paint in our big white 481 hull numbers on the side of our conning tower fairwater. The old man called us his gahdam shoemaker's elves. That made hauling paint pots and 225 lb. air hose around in the dark something special.

We used hemp lines. When you put a strain on them, they snap-crackle and pop... If they start to part, they warn you... A lay comes spiralling back to let you know she's about to go and warning you to clear out. A nylon line stretches and goes with no warning. She can come back with a bullwhip action that can cut a deck ape in half or shoot his ass thirty feet out into the slip. Bad stuff, nylon lines... They don't rot but they can tear you in two.

So you broke out your mooring lines and positioned them. Then you opened the pressure locker originally intended for ready ammo for the five-inch deck gun. Gone in some long ago indian trade. Out of the pressure locker came heaving lines.

"What in the hell is a heaving line?", the modern bluejacket asks.

Glad you asked.

It was fifty feet of line resembling clothesline cord... With a knot called a 'monkey fist' on one end. The monkey fist contained something to give it the weight needed to propel it like a projectile to the pier or outboard boat. One of the very few productive things enginemen did was save large metal nuts to give to the deck force to use in making heavies.

We had one known as simply 'the gahdam monster'... The monkey fist on that lethal bastard contained a poolball from Bells. If you threw the damn thing just right you could drop a charging rhino. We once cold-cocked a first class quartermaster on the bridge of the Cubera, named Turnip Seed, with 'the goddam monster'. Nobody ever believed us but it was an accident. If you are out there somewhere Turnip Seed... Honest to God, we didn't clock you on purpose. And for you who are saying,

"Dex you old bullshit artiste, nobody was ever named Turnip Seed."

His first name was 'Turnip', last name 'Seed'. I saw his I.D. and liberty card... Don't know if he shot his mom and dad for it but that's what they named him. He was lucky they weren't partial to marigold.

When you came in to tie up, at some point whoever was conning the boat on the bridge would yell,

"Put your lines over when you can."

The 'when you can' was taken as a personal challenge to the manhood of every ape topside with a heavie. You made one toss to 'wet 'er down' then coiled it up again and started trying to hit the poor jerks on the pier or topside on the outboard boats. The other boats wet their heavies down coming up the Elisabeth river channel. We did that and a heavie trailed aft and got wrapped around a prop shaft. A hint to anyone currently throwing heavies... Wet 'em down in the slip.

When you got your heavies to the receiving line handlers, you would 'bend' (attach) them onto the 'eye' of your mooring lines. The receiving line handlers would haul them over and drop them onto either a pier bollard or a deck cleat and you would winch the boat in by reeling in your brest lines with the forward and after hydraulic capstans. Then you would pass over your crossover spring lines... Shove over the brow... Get your mailbags and a load of fresh milk and you were home... Anchor pool winners were paid off and the liberty section stinking of a wholesale foo-foo soaking and hauling dirty laundry, would catapult to the beach or some waiting honey on the pier.

Heaving lines took time to make so the boat that owned them wanted to get them back. To aid in recovery, each boat color-coded their heavies. Like western cattle brands, each boat had a distinctive, one-of-a-kind color-code to stop heavie rustling. Requin was the worst, no 'count bunch of heavie rustlers that ever rode the range. We were so bad that when boats from other squadrons came in they would yell,

"We know about you heavie-stealing sonuvabitches... We want four heavies back, you one-way bastards... You got that? We're keeping an eye on all of you!"

We always gave'em back two.

Here's how you color-code a heavie. You take a gallon paint can... Let's say your boat code is red & white. You hold the heavie above the open can with red paint and lower it in until the monkey fist hits the bottom of the can and pull it up....you now have a heavie that is all red up to eight or ten inches... You let it dry. When dry, you dunk it in a can of white paint just enough to cover the monkey fist. When it dries a second time, you have a handy-dandy red and white heaving line.

Cattle rustlers used something called 'running irons' to alter cattle brands. Somewhere I heard that evidence of some evil bastard tinkering around with your cattle brand would be found on the inside of the hide... Musta been hell on cows.

To abscond with a heavie, you soaked it in methel-ethyl-ketone then dunked it in a deeper bucket the first time, just enough to cover the previous first dip. Rotten, lowlife way to do business but it kept your heavie stealing reputation intact. How did you steal

them with everyone watching your line handlers? Simple... You cut out a hole the size of a baseball in either side of a deck slat... A hole that a weighted monkey fist will drop through. Then you put a guy down in the superstructure. When the heave arrives, a guy behind you steps on the heave so it passes under the void in front of the heel of his boot. This allows him to move the monkey fist slowly to the hole, where the monkey fist falls through and while you are pulling the mooring line over, the rascal down in the superstructure is reeling in the heaving line which is disappearing down the hole... You can't see what's happening through a limber hole because Mr. 'I'm stealing your heave' is between the engine air induction and exhaust line. A good heave stealing team can rip off two every time. When you pass over two and get the...

"Where's the other two?"

You smile and say...

"We tossed'em over to one of your guys aft."

They usually figure out they've been honswoggled but are too embarrassed to admit it. Everyone knew we were stealing them, but never figured out how in the hell we were doing it. Adrian Stuke was one devious sonuvabitch.

The statute of limitations on stolen heavies has run out. For those of you having a cold beer and saying to your wives,

"So THAT'S how the bastards were doing it!"

All I can say is, thanks for the memories.

Adrian Stuke has authorized the release of this information under the federal 'Screw you if you can't take a joke' act of 1999. It will all be in our forthcoming book about the cold war smokeboat service titled *Blind Men and Monkey Shining* (See chapter six, 'Heave Theft for Fun and Profit').

More Cold War Secrets Revealed by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Here are a few more smokeboat secrets now safe to expose.

1. You can steal anything not welded to the hull on a tender if it will fit in an empty mail bag and you can carry it off the lower brow.
2. If you can obtain an officer's hat with scrambled eggs on the visor, you can get any heavy equipment operator in any navy yard to do whatever you want. You just put it on your head, look up at the crane operator make a few aboriginal hand gestures and watch a two-million dollar contraption the size of an office building pick up a skid of head paper and sit it on deck... It was like they saw teenage three-strippers every day.

3. At two A.M. 0200... Marine gate guards will accept a folded up one dollar bill and a blue laundry receipt as an authorized I.D. and liberty card... If you flash it and yell,

"Make it quick I gotta pee."

4. On a slow night a Norfolk hooker will take you home so you don't have to pay for a room for an hour. In 1959 this secret was worth \$ 7.00.

5. The pay toilet at the Jolly Roger (last one from the door) took your fifteen cents and wouldn't open.

6. The Coke machine at the main N.O.B. geedunk was always empty.

7. For a box of Whitmans' chocolates the honeys at the Motion Picture Exchange would toss in a couple of decent sea print films reserved for bird farms with low hull numbers.

8. It was not smart to exit the Receiving Station with a still warm DD-214 and ask the first four-striper you met outside the gate, "Hey sailor, you got a light?"

9. If you use a paint punt and crawl through the big limber holes up near the bow planes on a dark night, you can go pressure locker shopping for neat stuff. The topside watch on your boat has to lure the topside watch on the K-Mart boat aft and toss him a smoke and exchange a couple of bullshit loaded sea stories for the length of the shopping expedition. If the Bear Trap access to escape trunk is open... Skip shopping if you are not an All Navy Heavy Weight Boxing Champion.

10. If you can steal a boat hook from a visiting boat from another squadron paint it gray and stencil '481-SPARE' on it, you can trade it back to the leading seaman on the visiting boat the next morning for at least 5 skin books. Do not do this with boats in your squadron. They know the drill and always have a guy in the deck force big enough to give you a busted nose in trade. None of this was in *Blind Mans Bluff*, a book with no practical information for bluejackets at the Rat Level.

There Were Many Nights by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Nights on the bridge... Flat sea... Night steaming... Full moon with a reflection that ran to the horizon... Stars twinkling like a zillion diamonds scattered on black velvet... The aroma of hot coffee mingled with whiffs of pipe smoke... The drone of two on charge and two on propulsion and the gentle roll with green water sliced by the bow rising along the tanks, sloshing through the limberholes then cascading out and over the tanktops passing the screwguards leaving a phosphorescent twinkling wake illuminated by the glow of the stern light.

Lookouts bullshitting about cars they had dreamed of modifying, touchdown runs, where they had been nailed on the six yardline... Fish that outwitted them and cheerleaders panties they never got into. Watch officers... Killjoys who kept saying,

"Knock off the crap and keep an eye on your contacts."

Then five minutes later told you about some honey they courted in their third year at the Naval Academy.

Ships seemingly going nowhere passing on and off the radar screen. Red or green sidelights turning to stern light illumination until lost over the curvature of that thin line that isolated you from the rest of the known world.

Night baking smells filling the boat below and gently wafting up through the conning tower hatch to the bridge.

Sneaking a peek at a wrist watch hiding up the frayed cuff of your foulweather jacket and wondering where the bell tapping sonuvabitch was who was supposed to relieve you five minutes ago... And wondering if midrats would include whatever it was you had been smelling for the last hour, wondering who's blanket you would have to steal tonight. And, wondering when the tin cans you were to be working with would show up.

Scope packing was leaking again, Loran was acting weird and the cooks were out of garbage bag weights.

But it was early in the run, the milk hadn't clabbered. There were some new sex books in circulation, three movies you hadn't seen and the salt stains in the armpits of your dungree shirts hadn't reached the 'rinse out radius' yet. You still had smokes and soap... Two pairs of clean socks and fresh memories of two nights with a nineteen year-old barmaid from North Carolina who was doin' bluejackets to bankroll the down payment on a second hand 'mobile home' that looked a helluva lot like a trailer.

You knew the boys of the Cubera were in... Tossing down suds at Bells and feeling up Thelma. And the kakki-sackers off of Orion were at home getting their worthless backs scratched by mamma in front of a big screen T.V.

French toast for breakfast meant the cooks were unloading the last of the pier-loaded bread... Must be going stale.

The ink on the love letter in your dungaree shirt pocket was starting to go fuzzy from moisture saturation... Sweat. In a week it would be unreadable, but by that time you would have it memorized.

Your Selective Service board was still sending you nasty letters threatening to sic the dogs on you if you didn't show up for induction. And, you wrote back that you had been kidnapped by a major world power and were being held hostage at sea, and used a fleet

postage return address. They never seemed to get it until the Exec sent them a 'Get off his ass' valentine.

It was late... Damn near zero four hundred... No relief... The binocular strap on your 7x50s felt like it was attached to railroad locomotive and you had to pee like a gahdam racehorse. Where in the hell was your relief?

Then you heard,

"Bridge, conn. permission to lay topside and relieve the watch."

"Very well, permission granted."

Boots wacking ladder rungs...

"Hey, somebody give me a hand... Fresh cinnamon rolls... Right out of the oven... Rat made 'em... The animals are having an all night movie marathon... We cleaned out the mid-rats."

"Cleaned out the mid-rats? You worthless bastards! All of you are lowlife one-way sonuvabitches. Take these gahdam binoculars and get in here, you bell-tappin, movie watching bastard. You've got a merchant out there damn near hull down at 354 and a whole lot of empty ocean."

"Hold on till I get night adapted."

"Night adapted... I've had to pee for damn near an hour and Mr. One-Way King of the Bell-Tapping Bastards isn't night adapted."

"Eat your damn cinnamon bun and gimme a second."

"Bullshit! Get in here... Take these friggin' binoculoars and go to work. I don't know how to rig a damn cinnamon bun for a bladder swing check."

"Conn, bridge... Yell down to the stand-by on the trim manifold and tell him to run four black and bitters to the bridge."

"Bridge aye... Haulin' four topside in ten."

"Movie any good?"

"Yeah... Natalie Wood... I fell in love."

"That'll be the gahdam day... You and Natalie Wood... Jeezus that's a laugh. Get in here... Now, sweetpea! Mr. Smith, tell Natalie Wood's number one squeeze to relieve me."

"You heard him... Get in there Jerry and knock off the bullshit."

Life at sea... Peace, tranquillity and the perfect harmony of dedicated bluejackets manning bulwarks of a free people and as I stood on deck returning a quart of residual bug juice to the ocean, I wondered how much of the sea out there was fish pee and thought about Natalie Wood... Boy if she's got smoking skivvies for me, she was in trouble... I belonged to Debbie Reynolds. At nineteen, I would have pulled a six month fifty dollar dead horse for one peek up Debbie's nightie... And spent a lot of time wondering if an E-3 qualified man could ever show a movie star a good time.

At nineteen, everything seems possible and what the hell, Debbie might not even own a gahdam nightie.

"Rat... Who ate up all the friggin' mid rats?".

The Cigar Box by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In an earlier romp through 'navy days memories' I told about Requin's slush fund... The Saltwater Savings and Loan... The tooth fairy of all after battery rats.

The 'slush' had a board of directors... Six animals who met regularly to make the monumental decisions that controlled the totally illegal cash stash.

We would meet to report on the status of what was percolating in the cigar box. We would have two hour sessions about the future of our financial world.

"Hey! Pipe down! Dammit, secure the bullshit! Draw a cup of coffee and plant your butt... We haven't got all night."

"The Great Kahoona has spoken."

"We haven't got all night??? Whatcha got planned, Chief? In case nobody told you guys in the goat locker, this rust bucket is 400 miles at sea... If you've gotta date, it's gonna be one helluva wet walk."

"Buck, you know why they don't send donkeys' to school? Nobody likes a wiseass."

"Knock it off... Knock it off. Dutch, how much we got in the box?"

"3,458 bucks as of last payday with another 160 loaned out. Jack gave me a hundred when he got his orders to SUBRON EIGHT."

"A hundred? What in the hell for?"

"Because, idiot boy... He's a helluva good shipmate. You may not know it but you're gonna miss him, if we get some jerk to replace him. Jack could be a hardass but he was just doin' his job. The sonuvabitch got tears in his eyes when we handed him that new Chief's hat. He said, 'Who went in on this?' And I told him... The whole damn crew... Even the two messcooks. He said, 'No shit?' I said, 'No shit. Everybody tossed in the hat...They're going to miss you.' He squirmed around a bit and said, 'Bullshit... The slack bastards... You give that Hogan's Alley mob an inch and they will eat you alive. I've ridden six boats. Never saw a pack of idiots like those bastards.' I told him 'But they're sailor.' He looked at me, smiled and said, 'Depends on your definition of sailing.'

"Hey Chief... Jacks gone... Whatcha want us to do?... Cry?... He was a good guy... Old Navy... Old hard-ass Navy... I've got his teeth marks all over my ass."

"Yeah... Let's get back to business. What are we going to do with the surplus build up in the box?"

"Get Lucy a retread job on her diaphragm."

"Jeezus, can we be serious for five minutes? Is that too much to ask? Will it kill you smart-mouth idiots to be serious until we get some damn things worked out?"

"Ships party!"

"That's original... Beer ballgames and ships parties."

"You got a better idea?"

"Somethin' different... For once, do something adult and responsible... Is that an alien concept, ladies?"

"Whatz your idea of responsible? You sure as hell aren't gonna build a Requin wing on The Florence Crittenden Home For Unwed Mothers with three thousand bills and odd change. What have you got in mind... A college scholarship fund for Panamanian orphans?"

"For godsakes, don't buy any more of those gahdam Tiawanese lighters with the ships insignias... The Zippo look alikes that fell apart in two months... Boy, did we get hosed on that deal."

"Yeah and the cruise books... We all got soaked for twenty five bucks... The sonuvabitch went out of business and no damn books."

"Boy, we're a bunch of great businessmen... Real smart bunch."

"The cruise books were a wardroom brainstorm... Don't pin that bullshit on us. The lighters, yes... But the cruise books were some officer's idea."

"Ships' party... Dammit, we've never screwed up one of those."

"You've got it... Beer and babes. Chief, you'd have to be a damn fairy not to think that's a good idea. That's what boatsailors do."

"That's what we do best."

"Chief, we don't build monuments... We aren't going to be remembered. We aren't going to write our names in the minds of our fellow men. We're diesel boat sailors... They are scrapping our boats and we are the tail end of an era that's passed... Sonuvabitch... Beer and our mates... That's what it's all about."

"Let's vote on it."

And we did... And we drank beer, danced with women we never saw again... Sang, told lies, laughed, and built memories that lasted a lifetime.

It all came out of a cigar box.

'Teeny Weenie' Bill Ehney by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

These stories have been a magic carpet ride. They have put me in touch with shipmates I had lost touch with for many years and that is a gift beyond price.

I found him, William Ehney. He was a tall slender fellow from Summerville, South Carolina... Emphasis on the "tall". He was two inches taller than your average telephone pole and smiled all the time. His height destroyed the myth that you had to be pigmy or dwarf to ride the boats. Being just under twenty feet tall naturally got you a nickname like 'Teeny Weenie' to rhyme with Ehney... Pronounced "eeenie".

If you look under 'clean-cut American lad' in Websters dictionary it just reads... William Ehney. When every other blue jacket wearing Dolphins was out knocking the bark off of trees... Cohabiting with women who made Monica Lewinski look like a rank amature and pouring down liquids on par with paint thinner, William R. Ehney was out visiting museums and doing the kind of things intelligent intellectually mature people do.

If you were to ask Bill who Thelma was... He would say,

"Thelma who?"

While the rest of the idiots in Subron Six were out doing their best to destroy themselves, he was out buying film for his camera or doing the kind of things properly raised lads were expected to do.

He rode The USS Cubera (SS-347). He was a Quartermaster... A good one. There have only been two, worth a damn, Quartermasters... Simon Peter and Bill Ehney.

I met him in Sub School, class 182, Diving Section 121. He was smart... I wasn't. I spent a lot of time on the grommet squad... He didn't. I, along with a boatload of fellow idiots, spent hours memorizing stuff I didn't fully understand to pass tests I never fully understood. Ehney understood everything. He was our 'go to' man. If it didn't make sense and you were heading up the creek without the well known, paddle, Ehney would serve as your last resort.

Ehney had never been a class clown... Never wound up in detention hall in high school for getting caught in civics class reading Mad magazine... Passing notes... Snapping girls bra straps or making imitation farting sounds. In short, Bill Ehney was the son all parents wanted. How he ended up in the diesel boat service only God and the United States Navy fully understood.

He only tap-danced on one rule that I know of.

In 1959, Sub School students were allowed 'no outside' reading material... No skin books... No newspapers... No Playboy magazines... Nothing but letters from home.

The band of gorillas that ran the basic enlisted course up at New London's Snorkelvalve University for the Mentally Deficient, screened the mail for things like forbidden home town newspapers.

Ehney came from a town so small they only had a four page newspaper that was so small it could be folded and mailed in a legal envelope. No national news... No ball scores, no stockmarket tips and listings... Just the county fair pie-baking winners... The names of the sick to pray for... What apples were selling for at the Piggly Wiggly and who was visiting their aunt Sarah in Tweedleburg.

And most important, the great scandal saga of 1959... Some rotten lowlife sonuvabitch stole the 'Garden of the Month' sign from some lady's front lawn... A local highly-prized symbol valued dearly in a town where folks grew lovely flowers and the debate over flouridation of the water brought out lynch mobs in aprons, swinging rolling pins. In Ehney's home town there were only two evils... World communist domination and water fluridation.

In the middle of this controversy some evil hombre stole 'The Garden of the Month' sign... Making the Lindberg kidnapping small potatoes in comparison.

For ten weeks, everyone in barracks 141 waited for the weekly status of the stolen sign investigation. Andy and Barney's big case. Ehney would read us the latest, after taps... The case of the missing sign was our only link to the real world... That along with the price of lima beans and the front line reports on the flouridation war, was the only news we got.

We never knew if they ever caught the wicked rascal or multiple rascals. We had all kinds of theories. Some thought they would find it in some old gal's closet who got rejected for membership in the garden club... Some figured it was nailed up on the wall of some fraternity house. I personally subscribed to the theory that space aliens from the planet Mongo came to buy a bunch of bargain cucumbers at the 'Pick and Pay' and took the sign as a travel souvenir.

It has always remained an unsolved mystery... One of those open-ended memories we all have. If you know where it is, please call the Summerville, South Carolina law enforcement folks. The rapscallion has been on their most wanted list for 41 years.

Willian R. Ehney... They don't come any finer.

Pier 22 'The Concrete Boulevard' by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Pier 22 'The Concrete Boulevard' I don't know if there still is a Pier 22. Hell, they've torn down every smokeboat sailor's landmark on Hampton Blvd., the 'Main Street' of a sailor's world in Norfolk... So they probably demo'd the gahdam pier too. It's a good thing me, Stukey and Hemming got out when we did. They've changed the damn place so much that today, they would have to paint arrows on the sidewalks if they still expect drunks to make morning quarters.

If the old pier is still there, I'll bet the Old Orion Hotel and CPO Retirement Home went out of business long ago. It was the big landmark... All you had to say to the driver of any moth-eaten cab in Norfolk was "AS-18" and he knew just where to dump you. The Orion, 'Mother Onion', furnished the pier head watches... The Uniform-Of-The-Day guardians of the 'Concrete Boulevard'. They were usually seaman second organ grinder's monkeys, whose vocabulary consisted of,

"Let me see your ID and liberty card.", "Did'ja lose your white hat?" and of course "Ya want me to call your topside watch to give you a hand?"

Your hull number was your street address. But, unlike most of the house numbers in your hometown, it moved around a lot. It could relocate... Change nests... Shift berths to gain access to fuel fittings and to load stores. This could be a little disconcerting to a lad 'carrying a load', wandering around with a fellow drunk back and forth in the vacated nest saying,

"The sonuvabitch has to be around here somewhere... N'less the bastard sunk."

"Hey, kid!"

"Yeah, whatcha need?"

"Anyone hijack the 481?"

"Nah, she's outboard the Onion... Other side... Use the lower brow."

There was always a load of crap all over the pier. Fuel hoses... Ration crates... Drums of hydraulic oil... Parts fabricated on the Orion waiting on boatsailors to jackass them to their boats for repairs... Empty torpedo trollies... Bundles of banded decking to replace missing sections... Empty mailbags... Dumpsters... And a load of other gear adrift. It was home. The center of perfectly understandable chaos. It was a great place to live.

It was a place where an E-3 could plant his worthless butt on a stray crate and enjoy the sunrise over Craney Island... It was a place where the Great Unwashed Serfs of Submarinedom could meet at the dumpsters to unload the residual of the evening meal and exchange the latest news while bumming smokes off each other... And it was a place, where on a sunny afternoon, a lad could go to watch women in bright dresses, go to and fro with properly attired naval personnel.

From what I know of the submarine force of today, I am sure that piers are antiseptically clean... Possibly carpeted... With silver-plated dumpsters and gold-plated uranium buckets laid out in properly spaced rows. I can hear the lilting tones of the Muzak speakers playing renditions from the Naval Academy Glee Club... While fleets of UPS trucks deliver filet mignon and pressed duck for patrol rations. Progress has a way of making things better... Or seem better.

Progress calls for the elimination of smells... The distinctive smells of the old diesel fleet are gone. I'm not sure that is progress... It was part of the life we loved... It was part of our identity. Living like zoo animals and taking our slice clean out of the center of life's pie, was the life we knew and was the hallmark of our pride. We were idiots and we were happy with what little we had. In a way, it was what made us special.

Somewhere, it all changed. Somewhere, young men in ragged, acid-eaten dungarees and frayed raghats became old coots in three-piece suits... More comfortable in wing-tip shoes than red lead-spattered brogans. When we weren't looking, the U.S. Navy traded our pigboats for poodleboats. They started producing properly behaved techno-jackets to replace the old, antiquated lunatic bluejackets.

They started using terms like 'shipboard amenities'. Hell, there was a time that the best amenity a boatsailor could ask for was a gahdam blanket that he didn't have to take a hammer to, just to kill the wildlife that had taken up residence in the damn thing.

They started pinning on Dolphins at internal ceremonies, reminiscent of ivy league graduations... Instead of grabbing the newly qualified man at morning quarters and tossing his goofy smiling butt over the side well past the tanktops, then hauling him back aboard and cheering while the Old Man pinned his Dolphins on a dripping dungaree shirt. I'm sure there is progress in that but I'm not sure why.

It was tradition... Back then, we valued tradition. It connected us to those who had gone before... Especially the giants who fed Hirohito a steady diet of Mark 14 warheads. We

were very proud of being the downline recipients of the legacy they passed on to us. Pinning fish on a wet shirt was a ritual that was a bright link in the chain of the continuity that was the history of the submarine service.

The rationale for the elimination of the 'wet shirt' tradition, as explained to me by a very professionally correct and obviously responsible nuclear submarine officer, was that it involved silly, unnecessary and easily avoidable risk. Sounds right... Only one problem.

American boys of an earlier generation grew up climbing trees, shooting each other with Daisy 'Red Ryder' B.B. guns... Jumping off garage roofs and playing with fireworks one level below nuclear ordinance. Risk was an integral part of the excitement of living.

The acceptance of risk was a primary attraction of the mystique of submarine life. The pressure of seawater on steel hulls at depth has always held risk. People who want to avoid risk, become typists in the Ohio National Guard... They sure as hell don't sign up to ride worn out, World War II submarines.

What in the hell is 'unnecessary risk'? Every man the navy pinned the Navy Cross on, took one big-time unnecessary risk. I don't know that I would want to be a part of a sub force that placed an over emphasis on the avoidance of unnecessary risk.

Was the elimination of the unnecessary risk in pinning Dolphins on a wet shirt a gradual process or did they phase it out over time? Was there an interim stage where they tossed guys in the shower and said?

"You fine lads are far more valuable than those idiots who rode those stupid smokeboats... Don't slip on the soap."

It hurts when the service you loved, trashes the little things that marked the unique life that was submarining in your day. Do we resent it? Sure we do... It makes it that much harder to identify with the new force.

Clean, neat, shipshape piers... Ships that go damn near a mile deep, with racks for every man aboard... No watching sunsets on the surface... And filled with lads who got their Dolphins without a short trip over the tank tops of the boat they qualified on.

Screw a no-risk navy...

What happened to the navy that produced '31 knot' Burke? 'Bull' Halsey? Dealey? Ramage? Slade Cutter and Tom Parks? Is there a 'risk avoidance' training phase at Annapolis? Is that why they tore down the escape tower? Is that why they did away with all the sailor bars? Sea store cigarettes? Beer ball games? Russian acrobat drill (swim call at sea)?

In days long ago, girls became women, wives and mothers under the gentle caring ladies who had gone before. 'Homemaker' and 'mother' were revered terms. 'Family

values' weren't something we were looking for... We had them. And men went aboard U.S. submarines, worked hard, lived a rough life, earned Dolphins and the right to call each other 'shipmate'... Went from boy to man under the heavy-handed guidance of some of the finest men who ever lived... And became men who took deep pride in their acceptance as worthy of the title 'submariner'... And they sowed their wild oats... Bounced off a lot of stationary objects, left uncounted beer glass rings in exotic (and some not real exotic) places, took risks, and slow-danced with the devil.

They grew up, became responsible citizens, raised families, paid their gahdam taxes, and never forgot the days when they sat on crates, on a lousy looking pier, and watched the sun rise over the Elisabeth River on a June morning.

In the words of a true boat sailor... An old S-boat bluejacket, Tom Parks..."It was a shining time."

Where Were You Dec 7, 1941? by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I was just short of a year old, having been born the day after Christmas, 1940. I was still in three cornered pants but no longer taking meals on the other side of blouse buttons. There is an old silver cereal dish with one helluva load of dents in it and my name on it, proving that my table manners didn't improve a whole lot between my high chair days and my REQUIN messdeck days... Except that early on, folks didn't try to stick a fork through your hand on the way to a second helping of mashed potatoes.

I don't actually remember a whole lot about the bombing of Pearl Harbor... I don't think the noise reached Rome, Georgia. If it did, the noise from the Anchor Duck Mill covered it up.

I never really understood that my old man went off to war. I just remember that he turned up again in 1946, started bossing everybody around, started spending way too much time with my mother and #1 pal (Actually getting into bed with her at night).

He also stopped my mom from taking me in the ladies room. In the 1940, moms hauled their little boys into ladies rooms... They also licked handkerchiefs to wipe dirt off your face. I never really figured out the distinction between your mom licking a hanky and wiping stuff off of you or spitting on somebody... Except the latter could get your nose punched in.

Going into men's rooms with the 'bossy man back from overseas' was neat. He threw Camel cigarette butts in the urinal and you could chase them back and forth with your pee streams... Or if he wasn't smoking, you could have pee-pee stream sword fights. Most women probably fail to see the importance of this in the life of a kid getting to know his dad.. It was a big thing because it was really neat and something I had never done with my mom for reasons that should be self-explanatory.

He taught me all kinds of neat things, like how to blow the paper off a soda straw and how to poke a hole in a tincan, stick a firecracker fuse through it, pack it with mud, set it up in the street... Light the fuse with a lit cigarette and watch the sonuvabitch go damn near a mile in the air and come down on some poor unsuspecting bastard's roof. He taught me that belching and putting salted peanuts in your Coke at a baseball game were okay if there were no ladies present... He said the same applied to the words "hell", "gahdammit", "bastard" and "sonuvabitch", which seemed to have definite restrictions attached to the locations where appropriate. Experimentation showed beyond any reasonable doubt that Mrs. Temple's first grade class, Sunday school and anywhere within two miles of my mother and grandmother, were not included on the list of appropriate places.

He also explained that whatever I needed to know about buck nekkit ladies would be a subject of a several year downline discussion... Kids in East Tennessee usually got around to buck nekkit lady research way before the subject ever came up in conversation with their dads.

Cokes were 5 cents... A phone call was 5 cents... A newspaper was 5 cents... Sunday school collection plate took 5 cents... A pack of NABs was 5 cents... A box of Black Crows, Ludens Cough Drops, a Baby Ruth, Good and Plenty's, and a ride to town on the St. Elmo bus were all 5 cents. All you needed in life were bare feet, a big stupid grin and a pocket full of nickles.

Pride and Tradition by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Pride is a funny thing. It is a concept that can't be packaged and issued... It takes root in a crew that has gained confidence in itself and a deep respect for the leadership of it's senior petty officers and wardroom. Once a crew has it, it germinates in every heart that comes aboard.

Requin had it... It was part of the boat and it manifested itself in a cocky attitude and 'hell for leather' outlook of her crew.

It was most evident in dress canvas formations topside.

You formed up in two lines aft of the conning tower fairwater. Raghats in starched whites; Dolphins... Neckerchiefs and jumper flaps rippling in the breeze... Gentle popping of the ensign, jack and squadron pennant.

Chiefs and leading petty officers decked out in medals and sleeves with hash marks from hell to breakfast... And some wearing old World War II combat patrol pins.

The creak and pop of strained mooring lines... And the rattle of officer swords.

Two lines of bluejackets knowing it was going to be a long time between smokes and hoping a seagull didn't crap on their white hat or a \$2.50 laundry and press job. Norfolk had a seagull population whose express purpose in life was to dump aerial calling cards on submarine sailors standing inspection topside in dress whites.

You could see the nuke boats astern in their nest. They had their own nest at the end of Pier 22 because that was where they had all of the pixie dust connections for the moonbeam navy. To us, they were just big ugly bastards that were rapidly putting us out of business and relegating the boats we loved to the scrap yards... And there was not a damn thing we could do about it... Not one thing.

The nuclear navy made us all fleas on a dying dog. Our chiefs were relics of the past... Fossils of a bygone age. The floor of the Pacific was littered with rusting hulks that once had been the Jap Imperial Navy... Now oxidizing junk fathoms deep, entombing decaying Nip bluejackets, put there by the gray-haired, hard nose bastards standing forward of the two lines of bluejackets in dress canvas.

We looked like sailors were supposed to look... Raghats... Low-neck jumpers... Neckerchiefs... And bellbottoms blowing against your ankles in the breeze. It was impractical by any reasonable standard but that uniform gave us our distinct identity. Men wearing that uniform filled wooden boxes in military cemeteries throughout the world. I don't know who thought up that stupid short sleeve white shirt outfit... That uniform that looks like something worn by a nut house orderly. I wish the idiotic sonuvabitch would contact me and explain what our navy gained by adopting that goofy-ass-looking Good Humor truck salesman uniform. Screw progress that trashes tradition.

Sailors deserve continuity... A continuous chain. Without something to connect generation to generation, something to pass on the pride of unique identity, a force loses something.

I can't remember any adverse effects of wearing undress whites. They made me feel like I was a gahdam sailor. When you were wearing one, nobody ever took you for a bedpan collector at the local hospital.

If I was the CNO for a day, I would issue a directive that would require every bluejacket who owned one of those short sleeve white dog catcher shirts to turn the gahdam thing in for engine wipes.

I would say, "Horsefly, better men than you and I can ever hope to be, handed us down that uniform and it represents our bond with them. The idiots that took it away from you, broke faith and robbed you of a symbol that set you apart. It distinguished you and was universally recognized as representing the heritage of the finest navy the world has ever seen."

But I will never be CNO for a day and progress will continue to erode pride and tradition in the name of progress and modernization. Small men who are short sighted, if not totally blind will discard the historically meaningful and opt for the momentary fad...The current style with no tradition woven in the fabrics... No link with the ancestral legacy American sailors should be handed.

The poor shortchanged bastards of today are no longer linked by signal light... Celestial observation and marlinspike seamanship... Multi-frequency communication, global positioning and factory fabricated nylon line have replaced the seaman's arts and skills. We rode'em in the horse and buggy days... When being a sailor required saltwater savvy and technology was not our master. I'm glad it was that way... It made us special. Pride has a way of making a man feel special... Of standing apart from the herd.

So we stood there in the sun, shoulder to shoulder with our shipmates... Below the big white 481 painted on our sail. We stood there knowing we were United States Navy... We were qualified in submarines and we belonged to a naval force that owned the oceans of the world. Those oceans had been purchased for us by the men who wore exactly what we were wearing... Had stood precisely where we were standing and had been crapped on by the great grandfathers of the seagulls, currently shitting on our white hats.

Nuke Boats and Smokeboats by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Someday I'm gonna go into a bar and some nuke sailor is going to buy me a beer and prove that nukes are actually human beings and I am going to have to knock off this bullshit. They never did... And that possibility gets more remote with every passing day. So I will continue to tie cans to their tails and paint their fannies with turpentine... That is what smokeboat sailors do.

There is nothing prettier than a fleet snorkel boat slicing through saltwater. Anyone who fails to recognize the sheer beauty of that has a malfunctioning eyeball-to-brain interconnect.

In a flat sea, a fleet bow cuts through the water like a barbers razor... Neat and surgically clean... Leaving a narrow wake. Ships are supposed to do that. It was ordained by God and damn near every naval architect since Noah started collecting lumber to build his ark.

Somewhere some ingenious bastard added diesel smoke to make the picture appealing to ones nose as well as ones eyes. It is very difficult to improve on absolute perfection, but the clown who added the aroma of Fairbanks smoke did it... Kinda makes you wonder what the Mona Lisa would look like if someone turned her loose with the Avon lady.

Fleetboats were a work of sublime beauty. Any man who rode one still gets a lump in his throat when he catches sight of one in a late night T.V. movie... You see one of the old girls and turn on a little Victory at Sea music in your head and wade knee-deep in wonderful memories.

Nuke boats on the other hand, are some of the ugliest stuff ever created in the mind of man. One of the reasons that 'Hyman The Horrible' built the damn things to stay under water all the time is that the sonuvabitches are seagoing eyesores. They are fat, black and ugly. They push a bow wave the size of Chicago and leave a Grand Canyon wake.

If you put a toaster on a hippos back and dragged him through the water by his gahdam tail you would have a nuke boat.

Sometimes progress sucks.

Skippy Eaters by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Life in diesel submarines could get very boring if you didn't stir the pot constantly. To those folks who led normal lives it would be danm near impossible to explain... But we fabricated major controversies just to keep from going nuts. Arguments were a form of entertainment. Totally stupid controversy that divided the crew into factions supporting totally idiotic positions was the best entertainment you could get.

To compensate submariners for living in steel septic tanks like Aborigines, the United States Navy decided to feed us like King Henry... You know, in the movies they show King Henry the Eighth... Big fat sonuvabitch... Always had this table piled high with roast beef, haunches of venison... Loaded with everything, flagons of wine... Big heavy goblets... Everybody digging in, eating with their hands... Reaching across the table and spearing a leg of duck with a dirk... Greasy beards... Wine dribbling off their chins. Laughing and hellraising and tossing the bones over their shoulders to waiting dogs... The good life. That was the boats, the last freebooting buccaneers.

The Navy fed us. Any bastard who rode smokeboats and doesn't say he never ate better in his life is either a liar or a way beyond redemption, unsalvageable whiner...

And we had the best cooks. We never told them that, because ragging cooks was not only part of the unwritten code, it too, provided great entertainment. You tell a cook that he was worth a damn and the next thing you knew his head would get so fat you would have to Crisco the bastard's ears to poke him down the after battery hatch.

We had the best. Rodney A. 'Rat' Johnson. He could have been the head chef at The Waldorf Astoria. Loved Rat... We all did... We never told him, but he knew. Once, saw the man absent mindedly pick up a radish and a paring knife and carve it into a perfect miniature rose, toss it to a mess cook and say,

"Beauty is were you find it, kid."

All of my memories of Requin are somehow linked with Rat... He refereed the crew's zoo like the warden of the rat box, and fed us like kings.

One night we were jackassing sea stores aboard the boat... Somebody tossed us a box of powdered eggs off the truck. This booming voice yells,

"Throw that shit back in that truck, I ain't serving no gahdam powdered eggs to no boat sailors."

The O.D. said...

"Hold up there...what'll happen when we run out of eggs?"

"You let me worry about that sir, but I ain't usin' no damn frigging egg dust, you can bet your ass on that... I wouldn't serve that fake shit to a cocker spaniel."

And he never did. I yelled,

"Give'em hell, Rat."

And he winked...

"I'll have chickens livin' in the gahdam ward room before you see egg dust in my galley."

We ate better than the average bluejacket because the Navy damn near doubled our per man ration money... And this allowed our cooks to buy extra stuff at the base commissary.

Official Navy peanut butter came in olive drab green cans. It tasted like stuff you would find between a hippo's toes... Evil stuff.

So one morning when Mother Rat was heading to the commissary to do her little 'go to sea' shopping we said,

" Hey Rat get some damn decent peanut butter."

"What do you wayward children consider to be decent peanut butter?"

That is when it started and it was still being fought over when I left the boat...

"Peter Pan!"

"Skippy!"

There were two political factions on Requin. The 'Peter Pans' and the 'Skippy-eaters'. I was a Peter Pan. We were the intelligent culinary knowledgeable connoisseurs of the finer things in life. The 'Skippy-eaters' were worthless idiots who had hemorrhoids for taste buds. I wouldn't want to interject any personal bias into this raging controversy or taint this objective history with the slightest hint of prejudice but, anyone on the 481 who intentionally ate Skippy would spread kangaroo crap on Ritz cracker.

We Peter Pans kept book on the Skippy eaters so we knew who they were so we wouldn't run over them on the highway, late on a dark night, when they were out eating runover dead skunks.

To this day I can't understand why we had Skippy eaters. I have tried to forgive them but find it impossible.

I hope that the nuclear boat force had the good sense to outlaw the degenerate practice of hauling Skippy to sea... This would be a step up in the history of undersea service... A giant leap for mankind.

God Bless The Aussies by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Lads in the undersea forces seem to gravitate to the same watering holes in the various ports of the world. In every submarine anchorage around the globe there is a dive... Some rat hole with beer and barmaids where lads who ride diving iron, drop anchor.

They had great names... *'The Blind Parrot', 'The Rusty Bucket', 'Pete's', 'The Slop Scupper', 'Ginzo's', 'Mikes' Skull and Bones', 'Sally's Bar and Girlie Show'*... And of course the queen of them all, *'Bells Bar and Naval Tailors'*.

They were some of the worst dumps in the world but they were home to every subsurface bluejacket on the planet. The hull numbers of hundreds of submarines could be found carved into tabletops and the yellowed photos, ship's insignias, identification pennants, and ensigns of boats long gone, decked the bulkheads.

In these pits of depravity, boat sailors of the maritime nations of the world rubbed shoulders, laughed, tossed down combustible liquids, lied to each other, shared what little money they had, and at times busted each other's noses.

My favorite allies were the lads who rode, Her Majesty The Queens boats... Since they spoke a mostly decipherable facsimile of my own native tongue and my grasp of foreign languages was confined to Canada, England and small sections of Australia.

I loved The Canadians and Aussies. The Dutch and The Brits were great too... The damn Krauts always seemed to have a desire to make a down payment on the next World War... And the Frogs were worthless... Wore hats that looked like they had stolen them from organ grinders monkeys and smelled like the inside of a stripper's bra.

There were things you learned from painful experience. First, going into a gin mill with Brits and Aussies was the same as playing with matches in a fireworks factory. At some point, the words 'fornication' and 'Queen' would be used in the same sentence and carnal liberties with kangaroos would be mentioned... Followed by fists and furniture.

The Aussies don't take prisoners. Their idea of how to end an enjoyable evening was a free ride back to their boat in a shore patrol wagon.

They ragged our beer. Years later I was introduced to Fosters and understood why.

"Hey mate... Youse bloody idiots hev lousy be-e-er... In South Aus-tral-ia, leetle kiddies sell limmonate stronger than this... Hell, virgins piss is better than this poor excuse for be-e-er."

All of them had hollow legs and a camel's thirst.

Every Aussie boat had at least one circus-size giant. There couldn't have been a height restriction in the Aussie Navy. Jeezus, they had animals the cooks had to feed with a pitchfork and lead around on the end of a logging chain.

I remember this one monster from 'down under'. The sonuvabitch had to duck, coming through the door at Bells. He had a full red beard and a mustache to match the wingspan of a small plane... Had his hat cocked down over one eye with a hat ribbon that read... 'HMA Submarines'. We had liberty launches smaller than that bastard's shoes.

Thelma took one look at him and whispered to me and Stuke...

"For crissakes, I hope nobody pisses that ox off."

And I whispered back,

"If that monster hit you, they would be pulling molars out of your rectum for the better part of a week."

God he was big. He took a table, tossed his hat on it and had Dixie bring him a pitcher.

"Here's to bett'r days, mates", and he tossed down a glass.

"What are you lads drinkin'? I'm buyin... A round for all around."

We laughed... Learned about billabongs, jumbucks, Sheila's... That Waltzin' Matilda was going on the bum... And that a jolly swagman was a hobo. We found that the big Aussie was okay.... More than okay... He was one helluva boatsailor. The snorkelin' sonuvabitches from down under had it rougher than we did. But, they were a tough bunch and never complained. Great guys.

We were joined by four or five other kangaroo cowboys... And we closed Bells and wound up at the Jolly Roger... And then ended up shaking hands on the pier.

Those were the best Aussies I ever met. That night U.S. currency was no good... Couldn't spend a damn dime. They were the most generous bastards we ever ran into. They drank like they had hollow legs. They treated barmaids like royalty... And they had a million songs... Most of which would be inappropriate at a church picnic.

"She wore red feathers and a hooley-hooley skirt..."

That's all I remember. That and ...

"Our first coxuns' a silly, silly fool... He's only got a teenie-weenie tool..."

Based on that night, thanks to that giant Aussie and his wonderful mates, I have carried a wonderful picture of Australia in my memory.

One night at sea, we showed the film *The Sundowners*. When we were changing reels, Stuke was telling about the night we got loaded with the Aussies.

"Jeezus... They had this giant rascal who tossed down beer by the barrel load and the sonuvabitch could have thrown an elephant through a cinderblock wall... Robert Mitchum is no damn Australian... That big ape could have thrown Mitchum through the side of a gahdam heavy cruiser."

Buzz, we actually met Australia's secret weapon... We are still wondering how you got him in and out of a submarine and if your cooks had to use a coal shovel to feed him. The man had a skull like a tank turret and fists like Fairbanks pistons and fortunately for us, and the Norfolk shore patrol, it was packaged in one of the most generous, happy-go-lucky rascals I ever met.

I would have loved to have had one of his Aussie hat ribbons for my submarine wall because he represented the best I ever ran into and we were damn proud that we were allied with those guys. I never met any U.S. boat sailor who operated out of Australia in the Pacific War who ever had anything but praise for Australia and her people.

An old Machinist Mate who operated out of Australia once told me that his boat once sunk a well-known Japanese heavy cruiser. The news of their victory reached Australia before they came in and that they were overwhelmed with the reception that they got when their boat pulled into Freemantle. That Jap cruiser had been high on the Aussie hit list and the folks wanted to thank the boys who had put her on the ocean floor. Beer was free... They got kissed by girls from nine to ninety but in the words of our old 6 combat patrol shipmate, they were accorded the honor of (his words) "A free one, on the house, at a local knock shop". The madam of a prominent house of carnal pleasure met them on the pier and declared that the entire crew had a free pass for one visit to her establishment.

He said he stood in line for over an hour but that when at a ships' reunion several years after the war that was attended by the crew and many of their new brides, the subject of that high honor came up in conversation but no one remembered... Everyone told their wives they had no idea what I was talking about... They all remembered blasting the bottom out of the cruiser but had no recollection of the well-received honor bestowed on the crew.

They had blank stares and turned to their darlings and said...

"Wasn't me, Sweetheart, must have been some of the other guys."

"Hell Dex, I once stood in line at a cathouse in Freemantle that nobody was in. I stood there for an hour with nobody in front of me... Strange, I remember all of them in line."

Australia...must be a great place to be a bluejacket. Pretty ladies, hard men and a proud history.

Now I think I'll boil a billy of After Battery, mid watch, iguana plasma coffee and shuffle through a few more memories.

The Naval Supply System by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In my day The Naval Supply System was a little ragged around the edges. It was run by a bunch of shore duty scoundrels who siphoned off cumshaw at a rate that would have amazed the gahdam Mafia.

Our major supply point was our tender, the USS Orion... Our mother ship. She was the big fat mama hog and we were her piglets. She was a little short of tits and we spent a lot of time hungry as hell. Why? Because the thieving, sonuvabitches onboard Orion picked over us poor seagoing bastards like termites. Any supplies that passed through the 'Mother Onion' evaporated at a rate that staggered the imagination. We used to say that the pier rats that ran all over Pier 22 were what was left of a herd of buffaloes that passed through Orion.

There were no rules, so we made them up as we went along. They stole from us so we stole them blind. Anything not welded or bolted to Orion was fair game.

Orion was a steel warehouse with screws... Filled with lazy bastards who had a racket billet. They were fat, dumb and happy.

To us they were sheep to be fleeced.

You must recognize that this is written by an idiot who, along with his mates, operated in the dark corners and because E-3s are rarely credited with the intelligence of your

average housefly. So we were free to roam everywhere and steal everything not nailed down. We had to do it to survive.

"Hey Dex, you going up to the Squadron Office to pick up official mail and radio traffic?"

"Yo, Chief."

"How bout stealing us some gahdam pens... Pick up a stapler for the Yeoman and a clip board if you can lay your hands on one."

"You got it Chief..."

So that's what you did. When the idiots weren't looking you went shopping. You would be amazed at what you can toss into a guard mail pouch. We operated under an enlisted principal...The 'It serves the bastards' right... They're getting what they deserve' principal.

You have to realize that we were riding boats they quit making parts for... For which you had to beg, borrow, cannibalize, invent... And steal spares for. If boat sailors weren't inventive or smart enough to 'light finger' stuff... Our boats wouldn't have been worth a damn. We did what we had to do... And that involved wholesale tender theft.

We stole junk that we had no idea what it was... What it did... Why we needed it... Or gave a damn. You just brought it back... Tossed it on a messdeck table and hoped some sonuvabitch had seen one in 'A' school and knew what it was and if we could use one. If nobody could figure out what it was, what it did or how we could use it, we could always take it apart for screws, nuts, gaskets and usable parts... Like springs.

We once picked up a weird contraption in the torpedo shop on Orion... Had no idea what it was. It looked neat and we knew we didn't have one... And it was heavy as hell so we could use the damn thing as a garbage bag weight at sea. A lot of very technical equipment was used in the late fifties, early sixties to make garbage bags go to the bottom. Last resort... Negative buoyancy facilitator.

The day after we had reduced the weird contraption to a pile of assorted mechanical crap, the Senior Chief on The Squadron Office showed up for evening chow...

"Boy, all hell is breaking loose in the ordinance shop up on Mother Onion. Some jaybird misplaced some micro guidance unit for some prototype whiz bang torpedo they're testing on one of the Nuke Boats."

"What did the thing look like Chief?"

"It was about the size of a transistor radio... Any of you guys seen it?"

"Oh, no Chief... Never seen anything like that... Not since yesterday. Could have seen one yesterday... But not today."

What was left of that technological marvel was roaming around in the garbage weight bucket in the Forward Engine Room and the usable screws were in assorted baby food jars in the Sonar Shack.

Did we care? No... Make that, 'Hell no.' Why?

Two weeks before, we had been punching holes in the North Atlantic. It had been witch's tit cold... Really cold... And there we were on the bridge in ragged, shot to hell foulweather jackets... Busted zippers... Ripped and shredded gear. Jackets that had snagged on equipment in a hundred 'Clear the bridge' runs, and they had been patched and taped up an equal number of times.

We came in at night. Line handlers standing topside... Orion line handlers were waiting on the pier... Little lads fresh out of the cabbage patch. All decked out in brand new N-1 deck jackets. One with a white supply ticket still stuck on a sleeve.

The Prince and the Pauper.

So, we smiled at each other and said...

"Gotta find where that kid racks out on Orion and skin him for that gahdam jacket... He's GOT to sleep in the damn thing... I would. If I had that jacket, I'd have the sonuvabitch stitched to my back... Or pop-riveted to my gahdam shoulder blades."

You could steal anything within a thirty-foot radius of a clown wearing a welder's mask. Once watched Stuke walk off with a brand new pair of welder's gloves so a cook could pull pizzas out of the oven without burning his fingers.

Set beside a smokeboat deck force, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves were rank amateurs.

The guys off Redfin were worse than we were. They walked off with stuff it took two guys to carry. In fact, they hauled off stuff they had to chisel the data plates off of.

The Cubera deck force once showed up and walked off with typewriter and left their ratty piece of junk typewriter in its place.

Some clown on Cutlass hijacked a satin jacket from some shore bound Sublant basketball player that lived like a king... And the Cutlass lookout wore it at sea. He was a super hero to us. A satin Sublant basketball jacket off a prima donna, non-qual ballplayer. We never saw them play... We were out listening to PDCs and dodging tin cans.

It was all long ago. A long time ago when the earth was young. Screws were connected to electrical motors that ran off power produced by diesel fuel. They were great times because we beat the system and we kept boats going when we knew their day had come and gone. We were steel sharks that refused to go down quietly.

I am proud to have been a small insignificant part of it... To have had the honor of riding boats with a proud history. We put them away with dignity.

Today you couldn't duplicate our life if you had a million dollars. It's gone... Won't be coming back... But then sailors can't miss what they have never known.

Damn! It was a great time to be alive... Nineteen and be a part of Arliegh Burke's Saltwater Buccaneers. It was one big sea-going 'Hole in the Wall' gang.

Where is it all now? by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The deckforce was made up of a collection of moles and ferrets who spent most of their time wiggling around in the crawl space between the walking deck and the pressure hull... In port.

Like small animals in the wild, invisibility was the key to survival. The world of the E-3... Non-rated bluejacket, in the era of petroleum powered submersibles, you had to remain out of sight or blend in with your surroundings to be okay.

Chief Petty Officers were vested with power on par with God... With the exception of the part about changing water into wine... God kept that one to himself so CPOs didn't destroy their livers and have God's diesel submarines snorkeling around in five-mile deep Gallo screw top Muscatel.

The code of Chief Petty Officers requires only two things... First they must surrender their souls to the Devil and second, they must make life a burning hell for E-3s. It is not their fault - comes with the pay grade.

Chiefs feel some kind of obsessive need to keep every animal on the planet engaged in some kind of time consuming activity... Not necessarily productive activity. In my day, if a Chief found you parked in the mess decks between 8 AM and 4 PM, having a smoke and wrapping yourself around a hot cup of coffee, he felt that the sun would not come up the following day if he didn't put your lazy butt to work.

"Hey Dex."

"Yo, Chief."

"Why don't you grab a can of Brasso and give the urinal piping in number 2 a little buff up?"

In the life of anything above E-6, shiny copper pipe had a highly elevated level of importance. I always had this feeling that while all the animals in the Alley, were dreaming of perky tits and cute little fannies, the old coots in the Goatlocker were fantasizing about bright copper pipe and urinal valves.

The best things to do were:

(a) Remain out of the eyeball range of CPOs or if in range:

(b) Give the appearance of being totally absorbed in productive work.

Lets take (b). (This is giving away trade secrets.) There were several things you could do. For example, the Navy had little green cloth-covered notebooks... They used them for damn near everything. If you had one, it validated the legitimacy of whatever you were doing even if you weren't doing anything but looking very serious and just entering random, totally meaningless 4-digit numbers in columns, that you were making up as you went along.

A nice theatrical touch could be added, if you stopped every now and then and stared aimlessly at the overhead and scratched your head with the eraser end of your pencil. No Chief would think of interrupting a sailor recording figures. This was found to be effective throughout the submarine force.

Another popular flim-flam was the 'sealed envelope' trick. You can go damn near anywhere in the Navy if you walk fast, have a purposeful look and a sealed envelope displayed for all to see. A man with a sealed envelope can go anywhere... But must wear his white hat (shoes, optional).

We had hiding places. You have to have hiding places or some Chief would put you to work. We had three.

(1) The 'Siesta Nest' up forward of the impulse air flasks next to bow buoyancy. Use of this location called for random bursts of pounding on tanks and pressure hull with tools to create the illusion of productive work.

(2) The photo shop on Orion. Photographers had a racket billet. If Arliegh Burke had paid them on a piecework basis, they would have had to figure out how to live on a dollar thirty-five, every two weeks. So you could always get in a card game in the photo shop. If someone showed up unexpectedly and demanded to know,

"What'n the hell is going on here?"

"After chow card game sir. Two more hands and it'll be 'turn-to' time again."

"Very well..."

I've seen those 'two hands' take damn near five hours.

There was an added benefit to playing cards in a photo lab. They had this big table with high intensity carbon arc lights focused on it. These lights were intended to 'burn' images into metal plates so these light-etched metal plates could be used for 'on-board' printing projects. They could also thaw out and cook a special order frozen pizza in about five seconds. One minute it was frozen hard... Then 'whammo', you had perfect bubbling pizza and a wonderful aroma filling the lab. The bad thing for E-3s was... These 'photo whatever they were' mates played for money.

(3) In the days before God and Hyman Rickover invented blue and gold boat crews, scrapped the tender concept and created a clean... No dumpster Pier 22, there was a secret meeting place in Subron Six known only to the Almighty and about 30 E-3s. The Fraternal Order of the Deck Ape Costra Nostra and Subron Six Dope-Offs.

The pier head quonset huts. When the Orion went into the yard for a bottom job, the Squadron built four weird looking corrugated metal elongated igloo-looking contraptions called quonset huts. The Squadron Office moved in. They turned one into a kind of sick bay... No, more like a "I'm busy, what's your damn problem, take an APC and go somewhere and die quietly" sheep dip conveyor belt, make believe medical shack. And they turned one into a paint locker.

The paint locker became the damndest hideout E-3s ever created. All the leading seamen in the Squadron were given keys to this little metal wonderland. It didn't take a handful of 19-year old idiots long to figure out that by restacking about five million 5-gallon cans of Methel-Ethyl-Ketone, zinc chromate and enough Navy number seven gray to paint the entire state of Rhode Island, we could create enough room for a clandestine card parlor. The Navy, in its infinite wisdom installed an air-conditioner to keep the paint from blowing up. The place was the best thing God ever gave to E-3s... It was one of the best-kept secrets of the Cold War.

As an interior decoration statement, it left one helluva lot to be desired... At 19, your butt is perfectly comfortable planted on a foulweather jacket folded on top of a five gallon MEK can and a four-foot square, three-quarter inch piece of plywood covered with a ratty blanket, turned the place into a home away from home. Four decks of ships service Bicycles and twenty Playboy centerfolds turned it into the site of the international grand championship of the universe hearts competitions.

We never solved the 'where to take a leak' problem, but after dark we just hosed down the weeds behind the damage control training center. Someone got the idea to use an orange nylon air mail postal bag to haul stomped flat beer cans back to the scrap metal dumpster on the pier.

A week past, Ray Stone showed me a photo he took of Pier 22 not long ago. The gahdam place was as clean as an airport runway. Nothing there... No fuel hoses... No ration boxes... No oil drums... No busted mechanical parts... No dumpsters... No hemp

and nylon lines... No ' Show your I.D. and liberty card' signs nailed to falling apart guard
shacks... No ASR... No tender and no visible human life... Just a sterile concrete
structure.

"Where have all the sailors gone?"

Where have all the laughing bastards in paint splattered dungarees and frayed raghats
gone? Who hauled off the evidence of their passing? Pier 22 was once the center of our
universe. It was alive... It was our world. What in the hell happened to the
neighborhood?

Jury-Rigged Gear and 'Make Do' by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In the world of the old SSN (that would be Smokeboat Submarine Navy), improvised
repair was commonplace. At sea you had to make repairs with what you had available...
It was a case of 'use any gahdam thing you could lay your hands on' supply solution.

Boatsailors are some truly ingenious bastards. They can do damn near anything with
next to nothing and have proven it many, many times.

I would let an independent duty, submarine Corpsman give me a heart transplant. They
were damn good. We never told them that because we didn't want to have to Crisco
their ears to get them through a watertight door. But, those wonderful guys were the
best.

When you are at sea, you can't run out to the local hardware store and pick up stuff you
need to fix things... It is pretty damp between you and the repair parts required to keep
equipment 'on line'.

So you improvise... You cannibalize, you use pieces of things never intended for the
purpose you use them for and you invent solutions. Noah probably had to invent some
contraption to get elephant and hippo shit out of the bilges and over the side. You've
got a problem so you turn the crew loose on a solution.

I once saw a line handler on an incoming boat who had orange shoelaces in his left
boot.

"Hey Kemosabi... What's with the orange shoelace? Is that the latest fashion in New
London?"

"Hell no... Busted the sonuvabitch the first week out. You would think that some
gahdam idiot in the crew could come up with a spare shoelace... No, not on this loony
barge... So I used a piece of orange shot line."

It worked... That was the whole point. It served the intended purpose and when the smoke clears away, that is the only thing that matters. It will 'make do' until you can effect a proper repair.

I don't know who in the hell made Navy foul weather gear. I assumed some low bidder was turning the stuff out in the basement of a log cabin in the woods somewhere.

When I first got issued mine, I found it a bit weird that the jackets had both buttons and a zipper. Later I learned, as did every other poor sonuvabitch in the fleet, the reason was that the damn zippers were good for about six months. They were lousy... And some brilliant wiseman in Fleet Supply came up with a solution... Stop making them out of brass and go to plastic... Man, that was a bright solution. We never solved that problem... We just buttoned them up and lived with water that came in between the buttons.

Years before I rode the boats, some inventive bastard came up with the solution to the need for a seagoing ashtray. Some clown took a number 10 bean can with a doubled coathanger wire hook to hang on overhead pipe and interior air lines. We made hooks to hang on bunk chains for all sorts of weird crap. Such a display usually lasted about as long as it took for the Chief of The Boat to eyeball it and yell,

"Get that gahdam shit down... *NOW!!*"

COBs have very little tolerance for individual personal inventive expression and the ability to accommodate the storage of extraneous bullshit. Chiefs never acquire unruly collections of extraneous crap. As you accumulate hashmarks, your need for the simple pleasures of life becomes so damn simple you can pack everything in a bunk bag and a couple of side lockers.

They taught us the basic principals of refrigeration. Evaporation is basically what cools things down. So when the temperature reached a point where you could incubate baby chicks, the lads soaked their skivvy shirts in water and wore them when they hit the rack. We all did it... Personal air conditioning. A soaked tee shirt would cool you down enough to allow you to roll off to sleep and in eight hours your body heat and the interior bake oven temperature would make you wake up dry... Smelling like a Russian acrobat, but dry... And you could fill a saltshaker from the arm pits.

We made mats out of gasket material to keep our plates from sliding all over Hell and half Georgia in heavy seas. It worked... The same couldn't be said for peas and beans. One morning the Skipper said,

"I've noticed a lot of scantily-clad female pictures when I tour the boat. I don't want to continue to see that sort of thing. Am I fully understood?"

"Aye sir."

After quarters we were standing around pissing and moaning.

"Hey Chief... That mean we gotta evict Janet Pilgrim?"

"You dumb bastards... You don't listen too gahdam well do you? The old man said, he don't wanna see no more of them titty pichurs... So you frigging idiots gotta put em where the skipper don't see th' damn things. Have I gotta wet nurse you sonuvabitches all tha gahdam time? Whenna ya gonna wake up' an start thinkin' on yer feet?"

So if you wanted to inventory nekkit lady fittings, you had to go places where the officers never went... Lower flats... Inside panels of raghat head doors, sonar shack... Pump room... Dry storage locker and taped on the inside of every sidelocker door in the After Battery. Hell, the inside of the A.B. Goatlocker looked like the National Gallery of Nekkit Women Art. Proving that you didn't have to become a homo to collect hashmarks.

If there was a way to fix stuff, a boatsailor would find it. We jumped circuits with little pieces of wire... Cut gaskets out of a rubber boot... Made linkage pins out of a cold rolled steel rod... Use two Pyrex bowls to elevate our motion picture projector when the elevation leg broke... We even repaired a key on the Yeoman's typewriter with a letter cut out of a dogtag and filed down. We repaired things just to get enough time out to them to allow us to get back to Mother Onion, our tender... Sort of the diesel boat equivalent of putting a penny behind the burned out fuse in the fuse box until you can get to the store.

The best 'make do' we ever had on Requin was our bridge windshild. When they converted fleet subs to Guppy boats they gave them a plexi-glass, retractable quarter-globe windshild. The old high sail fleetboat conversions didn't get them. We got to feeling like redheaded stepchildren... So one of our officers went over to the Naval Air Station at Breezy Point and he cumshawed a nose bubble off a P2V Neptune bomber. He hauled it up to the sheet metal shop on Mother Onion, along with 40 lbs of coffee in two twenty-pound cans. He brought back the gahdamdest looking contraption ever bolted on the bridge of a U.S. submarine.

The nose bubble on a P2V Neptune was elongated and looked like a giant transparent Pope's hat when cut in half. We bolted the weird looking sonuvabitch on the bridge... It may have looked like hell but it sure worked... And it more than made up for all the ribbing we took from all the wisecracking bastards in the squadron.

I get the distinct impression that a lot of the individualism that characterized the old 'don't give a rat's ass' smokeboat force, would be out of place today.

Take ships' insignia... In the old force, the insignia of a boat was usually a humorous, happy-go-lucky rendition of a fish or marine life character. They made you smile. They were funny... Sharks spitting out torpedoes... Crabs biting Japs in the ass... Sharks

wearing white hats and smoking cigars... The men... The lads who rode the boats, created them and the good natured personality of the boatservice as we knew it.

Today, the insignias are mostly professionally designed official logos, that in my opinion look like hell... Look like signs on chain-operated hotels or over the doors of college dorms. Another 'change for the better' that has fallen far short of anything resembling progress. Once again proving that there is absolutely no link between change and improvement. A change that negates and diminishes tradition is not necessarily a good thing. Once lost, traditions are rarely returned to you... They become history and have a life that expires with the men who lived them.

The Hallmark of the Diesel Submarine Force was making do with what we had and laughing at those who gave up before they figured out a way to get the gahdam job done.

A Small But Telling Symbol by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Have you taken a good look at a modern day Petty Officers crow lately? If not, go do it. Then take a look at the crow worn by a rated Bluejacket in the '50s and early '60s.

Once upon a time the eagle worn by American Petty Officers was a fierce looking rascal... The crusty old bird had just made a meal out of two nasty world powers and had pointed wings spread in a defiant posture. He was the expression of a fighting force. His beak gave you the impression that he would tear a sizable chink out of you if you got out of line. Our old pal was a gallant fellow, the seagoing symbol of a nation with a '*DON'T TREAD ON ME*' heritage.

Somewhere in time, when we weren't looking our old defiant crow got sensitized along with Naval leadership. He became a 'Mother may I' looking canary bird.... Today the cute little fellow looks like he would be more at home in a cage in granny's parlor than on the arm of a fighting sailor. The poor little fellow has literally had his little wings clipped and has become a sad caricature of his former self. Hopefully this is not just another step in an evolutionary process. It would be sad if one day our bluejackets woke up to find Tweety Bird perched on their rate designator.

I blame the complacency of our present Naval Force...They diminish your legacy daily and you lazy sonuvabitches let them do it. From award inflation to loss of your thirteen button blues. You let them hijack the meaningful and trade you horseshit for tradition. Did you raise hell? If so, either nobody heard you or nobody gives a good gahdam what you think... Which is worse.

At least the Army raised hell about the wholesale trashing of the beret, once the symbol of pride and distinction of U.S. Army Rangers. You guys let them slip you a bird out of Mr. Rogers' neighborhood and nobody heard a peep out of you.

Take a good look at that cute little fellow... Boy, is he a watered down sweet-looking symbol. I am sure he doesn't offend anybody but old sailors with long memories.

Jeezus, what a microcosmic symbol of degeneration... A smallbore representation of a pervasive lack of caring.

Who wrote to the editorial staff of *All Hands* magazine and said,

"What simple jaybird screwed with our gahdam *CROW*?"

I hope Arliegh Burke never sees the damn thing... I would hate to think a four-star wildcat like Burke would ever know that his boys were going around wearing parakeets.

The Old Rascals Will Remember by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

This is one from the heart. Not that anyone probably gives a damn or has a reason to, but it is the 'two cents worth' of an old ex-bluejacket who was once afforded membership in what he considers the finest organization ever assembled...The United States Naval Submarine Force.

It gave me love and a respect for heritage and tradition, that allowed me to recognize that I have a place in the continuous chain that is the history of the U.S. Navy. I was a part of that history.

When I joined, every incoming raghat was given a book... *This is Your Navy*, by Theodore Roscoe. The same gentleman who wrote *Submarine Operations of World War II* and *Destroyer Operations of World War II* (Later published in popular paperback form as *Pigboats* and *Tin Cans*).

This is Your Navy was published by the U.S. Naval Institute to provide each incoming prospective bluejacket a single volume history of the Navy. It was written in the style of a yarn, a salty language adventure... It was great. Any young man who failed to be ignited by that book would have to be one 'soul dead', sonuvabitch. It is my all-time favorite book.

The first time I read it, I was on a bus going from Great Lakes to a receiving station... Stayed up all night reading it. Any book that keeps an eighteen-year-old idiot up until dawn reading by the overhead light on a Trailways bus is one damn great book.

Over the years the book fell apart and after that I don't have any idea what happened to it. In the years since, I have haunted a lot of used book stores trying to locate a copy. They gave one to every sailor, so what the hell happened to all of them? But that doesn't have a damn thing to do with the intent of this piece.

The history of the Navy is our legacy. It was passed to us and it is up to us to keep it intact and pass it undiminished to future generations. That is our obligation... No, more like a sacred duty.

Take our uniform... The one the uninitiated refer to as the 'Crackerjack suit'. That uniform in an earlier form, but easily recognized by my generation of sailor, was worn by Civil War sailors... And every succeeding generation of seagoing enlisted sailor since.

The U.S. Navy uniform is unique. First, no other service has maintained the continuity of their dress uniform. Your low-neck jumper blues... Those thirteen-button low-neck jumper blues predate anything worn by our sister services. It has within its seams, a valiant history of sacrifice and devotion... It is a symbol both recognized and respected by every seagoing sailor in the world. For well over a hundred years, it has been the hallmark of the protector of freedom of the seas. Good men have been proud to have been buried in it and gallant souls have died wearing it in service to their country.

It is a uniform that lends itself to individual expression. In a world of regulation and the application of strict standards, the powers that be, turned a blind eye to the eccentric liberties taken with the beloved 'dress canvas' uniform. It has always belonged to the bluejacket and has been accepted as his expression of the pride he has in himself and the fleet he served.

Roy Ator, an officer who was a first rate submariner, once was a bluejacket. He rolled his raghat. Men, who wore a rolled hat, would gently roll the rim and stuff it under the front of their jumper in a chow line. Guys who preferred 'wings' in their white hats, tucked the edges under then folded it in the middle, then took it and stuffed it in the back of their jumper collar. Nobody taught you to do it... You just did it, because sailors had always done it.

Some sailors meticulously took a dime and painstakingly rolled their neckerchiefs until they looked like a yard's worth of garden hose... Other lazy bastards (like myself) would take their neckerchief to some gal at a naval tailors and have her turn out what was known as a 'greasy snake'... You could get two 'snakes' out of a regulation neckerchief. Pressed flat, they looked great and were light enough to blow all over hell and half Georgia in a light breeze.

Some tied their knot at the bottom of the 'V' of their jumper collar... Others liked a high knot a couple of inches above the 'V'. Sure, the old barnacle butt CPOs would rag you...

"Dex you look like a gahdam Pogey Bait Fennolly Hopper."

Never knew what a Fennolly Hopper was... Only know I looked like one so Stuke must have looked like one too. Only old heavy gut-ballasted Chief Petty Officers had actually seen whatever Pogey Bait Fennolly Hoppers were 'cause the last one died before Abe

Lincoln was born. SUBRON Six had a couple of old bastards that had dated Abe's mother when she had all her own teeth.

The trou... The old stand-by thirteen-button blue bellbottoms had a pocket for a pocket watch. By 1959, it had become a 'Zippo lighter' pocket. You tucked your pack of whatever you smoked in your sock. Your wallet got folded clam shell style and got folded over the top of the waist of your trou and you pulled your jumper down to cover it... Every barmaid and hooker knew the exact location.

You never put anything in your jumper pocket except your I.D. and liberty card. Anything else looked like hell and if you were wearing whites, reaching in your pocket for stuff would get it dirty. A good set of tailor made, seafarer whites had a patch pocket instead of the weird slit pocket that came on regulation whites. A real set of thirteen-button blues or whites had no belt loops. Instead there were a series of eyelets right above the terminal point of your ass crack called 'gussets' and you had a mate lace them up and square knot them to your size. It was 'Navy'... Old Navy... Back then, being 'Old Navy' was damned important.

So you decked yourself out in dress canvas... Rolled across your quarterdeck... Popped a snappy salute to the colors aft... The Topside Watch hollered,

"Hey Dex, if you get laid twice, bring me back one."

"Sure horsefly, you bet."

And, you were off to terrorize the civilian population... You were in Arliegh Burke's Navy and you looked like an American bluejacket... Because that was exactly what you were.

It is what every saltwater, deep-diving sonuvabitch who came before you was... And in 1959, we all knew deep down in our hearts that would always be the way it was. Nobody would ever be so gahdam stupid as to let go of that uniform. Hell, we all knew that our sons and grandsons would someday wear that wonderful symbol of the finest Navy that God ever assembled.

At the time it was called Indo-China, nobody knew where it was... Or cared. Nobody had ever heard of Elmo Zumwalt, the forward thinker who invented saltwater mediocrity. And somewhere, somebody decided thirteen button blues were outdated and that the history of the United States Navy was not enough to excite young men so they created compensation and education bribes... And quit handing young lads copies of *This is Your Navy* by Theodore Roscoe.

They trashed the dear and meaningful for a bunch of superficial, meaningless horseshit and called it progress... Shame on the bastards.

The Beginning As I Remember It by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

We were young... Most of us were green lads in our late teens. Our seabags and much of the issue contained in them smelled like mothballs. Our white hats were still stiff and our jumpers still had original piping and boot stripes. We had boot haircuts... New shoes and no bent dogtags.

Nobody knew anybody else in the draft. We arrived by train. Some guys met each other on the train... I slept. I had come by bus to New York and fell asleep right after finding a seat on the train. Don't remember anything on the train ride up through Connecticut... My first memory was being shaken by some kid with a heavy yankee accent...

"Hey wake up! We're here... We gotta get off... Come on, wake up! There is a First Class out there with two buses... Up and at' em!"

Mr. 'wake-up man' never made it through the first week... One day he just wasn't there any more.

Some guys just quit. Some failed to comprehend the material and some got kicked out... Just sent packing.

To this day, I have no idea how the selection process worked. Have no idea what they were looking for. From where I saw it, it looked like some kind of voo-doo dance... They asked us a load of strange questions.

I remember that some very serious gentleman asked me if I would have any moral reservation or mental conflict with attacking the enemy by sneaking up in a ship from an unseen position.

"No sir... I could sneak up on a gahdam Russian and kill the bastard in his sleep with a sledgehammer."

He looked at me like I needed help.

Some jaybird with a clipboard and a medical coat went into great detail about the need to answer all his questions honestly.

"Don't try to guess what we are looking for, just give us honest answers. Do you understand? If not tell me."

"I understand."

"Just say, 'yes sir'."

"Did you ever wet the bed?"

"Yes sir."

"You did?"

"Yes sir."

"When did you cease to wet the bed... That is, assuming you have stopped?"

"Hell, I don't know... I was a baby... I didn't keep track of it... I guess I quit about the time I got out of diapers. I probably quit about the time you did."

He told me that in the future I could say 'no sir' if the bed-wetting question ever came up again.

Another clown had us jump up and down on one foot and put our index fingers on our noses... Weird.

One thing I remember clearly. The bunks in barracks 141 were double bunks... On one end it said, 'HEAD' and on the other end, 'FOOT'... And they were positioned where they were alternating from head to foot... Looked strange.

So after one of his, 'you stupid bastards' lectures, the Chief ended with...

"Any of you stupid bastards have any questions?"

"Aye Chief... How come it has that 'head' and 'foot' stuff stenciled on the bunks?"

"Armstrong, it's an intelligence test that you obviously failed. Why don't you learn to keep your gahdam mouth shut and let us wonder if you are a complete idiot... Instead of opening it and removing any lingering doubts?"

" Any other questions?"

At this point some jerk wanted to know if it was okay to throw away his Donald Duck flat hat... And in that split second, I went from the dumbest bastard in Diving Section 121 to the position right above the duty dumb bastard.

There was one other totally idiotic experience I had at New London that only one or two folks ever knew about.

They had a coin-operated laundry where Sub School students could do laundry. Kind of a way an enterprising, 'do it yourself' inclined young blue jacket could save a couple of bucks rather than send his uniforms to the base laundry.

They had vending machines where you could get soap powder for a dime and a bottle of Clorox for a quarter. I got one of each... I read the instructions on the packet of soap powder it read...

'Open and pour contents in machine... This packet contains a pre-measured amount of detergent, good for one load.'

So, I tore it open and poured it in... The vending machines gave you a pre-measured amount... 'Good for one load'. I unscrewed the cap on the Clorox and poured the entire contents in the washer. I should have read the label.

Forty-five minutes later, what had been three sets of recently issued undress whites, had become the whitest, cleanest set of eaten up rags in New London... Even the rate stripes had turned white. It is amazing what ten times the recommended amount of Clorox can do to undress whites... The gahdam things just dissolved. So much for the economical advantages of 'do it yourself' uniform washing. It was also my introduction to non-reg patch pocket Seafarer whites... And the availability of greasy snake neckerchiefs.

There was a point where it all came together. The mechanical... The physical principles of submarine operation and the location and operation of most of the critical equipment, all of it came together and became totally fascinating and fun to understand. When I hear people speak about the breakthrough of a religious experience leading to personal salvation, I figure it must be like finally fully understanding how and why submarines operate like they do.

New London was where it all began. I never understood what they saw in me, but I will be eternally grateful for their faith in me... And I hope I never gave them any reason to regret their decision to send me to the boats.

I never have had any reason to regret my decision to try to become a submariner.

A Couple of Old Memories by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

One evening, Ray Stone and I were sitting around putting a dent in the beer supply in the garage refrigerator. Just two old coots sitting around swapping old stories and laughing like a pair of idiots. Are we unique? I mean, do other old boatsailors sit around after dark listening to gahdam crickets... Pulling pop tabs and piecing old recollections together anywhere other than my back patio?

Dredged up a couple of old ones.

It was late one night aboard Requin... Riding surfaced. Stuke and I had the 8 to 12 in the shears. We had a belltapper in our relief section... A kid who was notorious for dragging

his ass out of the rack late and turning up 15 to 20 minutes into the next watch. He was a decent kid... Meant well, just had this weird quirk... He was a belltapper.

Belltapping is a major sin or was... Was in the old days... It was never used as a noun... It was always an adjective that preceded 'sonuvabitch.'

It was bad enough on a nice balmy tropical night, but on nights when you were plowing the North Atlantic in the dead of winter... Cold, wet and wondering if chunks of ice were forming in your arteries... Where your bladder had been sending you the 'you're well overdue for a piss call' signal for the past thirty minutes... Relieving late can be a little inconsiderate. You spend some rough minutes sliding up the cuff of your foulweather parka to sneak a peek at your watch and wondering if you could get somebody to run a bloodhound through the boat and locate the bastard before you turned hard and froze to death.

Well, he finally turned up and I pointed out the contacts I had been working handed him my 7x50s (binoculars) and hauled ass below.

When I stepped into the crews' mess, the Below Decks Watch from our section... Section 3, was sitting there stuffing what was left of a plate of mid-rats, into his goofy face.

"Hey, you lazy bastard, are you incapable of getting Mr. Belltapper rolled out and up to the gahdam bridge in time to save a shipmate from freezing? It's 2000 degrees below zero up there, you idiot... It's cold... You may have a nice warm cozy watch down here strolling around the gahdam boat... But we are up there freezing our butts off. You know those frozen fish they sell in grocery stores? This is where they catch the bastards."

"Hey cook... I'm going aft and piss a giant icecycle... Then I'll be back for a plate of mid rats... If that's okay with you, you non-qual idiot."

"You've got it, Dex."

When I got back the messdeck was empty... No plate of mid rats and from what I could see... No damn cook. It was rapidly turning into a bad night.

So I looked into the galley. There was this green cook striker digging chow out of a sharpshooter bucket with a spoon.

"What in the hell are you doing?"

"Fixing you a plate of chow. I thought everyone had been fed... Didn't know about you... You were so late, I didn't figure you were eating. I scraped out all the leftover chow... But it's okay... I'm digging it out of the middle of the bucket... It's okay... It never touched the sides."

'It's okay... It never touched the sides' became a very popular saying on Requin after that... Everything was okay as long as 'it didn't touch the sides.' We applied it to everything. Silly? Sure, but we milked it for every last laugh.

Another memory.

If you rode a diesel boat in Squadron Six, you will remember the topside watch shacks that kept you from freezing to death in the wintertime. They were designed by the same sonuvabitch who invented the one-hole outhouse. They made them out of plywood...They weren't crafted by folks who built pianos or fine furniture...They were rickety, beat up gray painted plywood contraptions with a hinged door that had a Plexiglas window in it. They had a shelf for the topside logbook. Most of the time they had a phone rigged inside...If you had one with a phone, you spent the night answering calls from women wanting to talk to husbands and boyfriends...

"Is Charlie aboard?"

"Hello... Is this Requin?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Is Lt. So-in-so aboard tonight?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Would you tell him Billy has the measles?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Is Seaman First Michael Doo-Dad aboard? This is Bob Whatcha-Macallit from Crazy Jacks Used cars. Tell Seaman Doo-Dad that he is four car payments behind and he needs to get in touch with me."

"Sure, I'll tell him that the bloodsuckers are after him."

"This is Als' Bar... Tell Jack Gates we found his wallet... He can pick it up from Maggie."

"Is Willie Jackson there?"

"No, ma'am, he's ashore on liberty tonight."

"Would you be so kind as to tell him his mother called to wish him a happy birthday?"

"Yes, ma'am, would be happy to."

It went on all night. Guard shacks usually had writing all over the inside... More stuff than the inside of an Egyptian tomb.

Phone numbers... All kind of phone numbers... Mostly ladies with loose panty elastic... The broadcast numbers of all the good Norfolk radio stations... The phone number to the quarterdeck of the Orion... Limericks... Crude pictures.

In the wintertime, the Electricians rigged up an electric heater... It was a sorry excuse for something meant to provide warmth... you had to tour the complete deck and check the lines to see that they were tight. When you had a heater with a heating element the size of a toaster, opening the shack door every fifteen minutes cancelled out whatever heat you could generate between door openings.

We had a skipper who had a real aversion to the topside watch practice of caulking the wide cracks in the plywood guard shacks with geedunk wrappers and chunks of cardboard torn off Krispie Kreme Doughnut boxes. The skipper was a very good man... The only problem was that his naval career had been spent totally beyond standing four hour mid-winter topside watches freezing his gonads off in a wind tunnel, Birds-Eye frozen guard shack.

These are the kind of memories old diesel boat raghats collected. Nobody, other than idiots who rode those old boats, would ever understand or give a damn... Hell, why should they?

But hopefully there are there are a couple of old stove-in, gray haired former E-3s out there somewhere who remember spending four hours in darkness stamping their feet to keep blood circulating in damn near frozen toes... Answering the stupid phone... Herding returning drunks to the After Battery hatch and praying they didn't break their fool necks on the way down the ladder... Tightening loose deck locker lids... Unwinding the colors aft that kept getting wrapped around the staff with every change in wind direction... Taking the slack out of frozen mooring lines... Drinking cup after cup of all night bottom of the pot coffee passed topside by the Below Decks Watch... Writing 'Moored as before, all lines secure' in a raggedy-ass green cloth-covered book with coffee stains on damn near every page... Listening to late night Norfolk radio and the ads from the big "O" Naval tailors where some pirate bastard named 'Old Bill' wanted to put the entire Navy in \$29.95 tailor made blues... Answering the phone and yelling down to the Below Decks Watch,

"Hey below! Go wake up Wally and tell the sonuvabitch Annie is on the phone... And tell Bob, Trixie called."

I hope somebody remembers. It's not much but it was a part of E-3 history. These are the kind of memories the animals collected... And you would be surprised at how they can fill an old diesel boat sailors evening recounting those times over cold beer on a warm summer evening with an old shipmate. I hope nukes have those memories when they grow old.

Special Meals at Sea by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

How many times over the years has your wife prepared some meal, or your friends mentioned some dish and your mind drifted back to a day long ago when you remember a grinning cook saying,

"Man are you ugly bastards gonna like this... Learned from a stew burner off the Clamagore... You're gonna love this stuff... Meatloaf a la SUBRON 4."

And it was every bit as great as advertised.?

Compared to the seagoing monsters they bolt together today, a smoke-belching fleet-boat was small. Small boats with a single crew become a kind of communal order with a tribal hierarchy. We had a tribal king... A medicine man and some witch doctors who wore aprons and worked their magic in stainless steel pots and baking trays in a galley no woman would tolerate in today's modern appliance world. Hell, kitchens in house trailers are bigger than the huts our witch doctors operated out of.

Boat cooks were the best... Any ship that got a cook with the hull numbers of submarines listed as previous duty stations, held a three day prayer meeting to thank the almighty for bestowing such a gift on them. I don't know what the next level of proficiency is just above 'Totally gahdam magnificent', but that was what they were... Not at the time, but later when we had grown older and had the experience and the ability to make the comparisons necessary to recognize truly gifted cooks. At the time, they were a bunch of loudmouth jerks in dirty aprons who spent far too much time telling you how much you were going to like what they had been spending the last three hours whipping up for your express delight. A good submarine cook can bake a tractor tire and make it taste great.

One of their secrets was that they got the ingredients beyond the bounds and limits of the Naval Supply System. Every gut bandit had secret stashes of sherry... Spices that could start a major blaze in your nose hair and cans of saved grease and other culinary drippings that would have given a health inspector a terminal stroke.

They made trips to the base commissary like 'little Mary the Housewife' to buy stuff big ships never saw... The Requin cooks bought bottles of 'Texas Pete' by the boxcar load. We had guys... Mostly snipes who would have poured Texas Pete on an ice cream sundae... We had animals living in our engine rooms that would have eaten links out of our anchor chain if they could have laid their hands on a 55-gallon drum of 'Louisiana Hot Sauce'. The sonuvabitches had to have had asbestos-lined colons.

We had a cook who had a perpetual soup pot going... He just tossed leftover stuff in a big heavy aluminum pot... Kept tossing in kidney beans and adding water. It was great... We called it 'Sump Pit' soup... The stuff gave you green gas farts that could

have inflated the Goodyear blimp and could make Hogan Alley rats cry... But it tasted great. We used to yell,

"Hey Rat... Better throw in some more beans... The toad guts are floating to the top again."

But, when you dropped below on a 'Freeze the Balls off a Brass Monkey' night and called for a bowl of Sump Pit... And the Duty Cook slid it to you across a messtable, it beat anything you could get in any restaurant in the 'Capital of Frogland.

"Hey Rat... Wonder what the poor people are eating tonight?"

"Dex, they are making 110 bucks a month plus sub, sea and foreign duty pay... Standing lookout on antique submarines and sitting around in wet foul weather gear, grinning like idiots and slopping soup all over just wiped down messtables and saying dumb stuff like, *'I wonder what the poor people are eating tonight?'*"

Rat Johnson was a great cook but he left a lot to be desired in the sensitivity department. He also said, *'I'm not your gahdam mother'* enough to leave no doubt in anyone's mind that he had never once given birth to anyone riding the 481.

They had big old mixers that looked like the barrels of cement trucks. They whomped up stuff in those mixers miles at sea that was the next best thing to erotic thrills provided by buck-nekkit fan dancers.

Anyone who rode the old boats will remember the smell of cinnamon buns baking that wafted up to the bridge... By the time the first load cleared the oven door, the lookouts and deck officer would be on the verge of resorting to wholesale cannibalism. Any old boatsailor who can't remember the great smells of his night bakers, better get a rack at the Mayo Clinic because he is rapidly approaching test depth of mental deterioration.

They say that confession is good for the soul... Well, once a cook who will remain nameless for the sake of his criminal past, bought two boxes of illegal Cuban hand-rolled top of the line, stogies.

After a particularly memorable meal at the point where the creatures that had crawled out of the engine spaces were rocking back for a good belch, the cook passed around the cigars. While the messcooks were doing the dishes, we sat there firing up our nine inch 'contraband Castros'... Content to put a twist in the panties of the Secretary of State and tapdance in the glow of a possible Captains mast... For the simple joy of sitting in a stinking smoke cloud, enjoying a forbidden pleasure. It was another thing old boatsailors did... And did best.

We loved 'mung'... A contraction of monkey dung... It was a mixture of ground beef, onions, bell peppers and a half gallon of napalm-based hotsauce... The next morning, it would char the seat of your skivvie shorts but the meal itself was pure Cordon Bleu.

Once we had swordfish steaks... We'd been out a few weeks and somewhere in that time we passed the point where God starts to recall things no longer living... Phase one of that dust-to-dust concept. When the cooks made the break-out for the meal, our forthcoming, seafood treat smelled a little weird... But since swordfish was not a primary dietary staple of the crew, we failed to recognize the telltale imprint of the early stage of finned-critter putrefaction... And in fact, we later consumed a load of something that should not have cheated the GDU. Just the mention of the word 'swordfish' still gives me the 'green apple quickstep'.

Every lad on board knew that the outboard waterway in the Goat Locker held the cans of warm Pabst Blue Ribbon it took to make the beer battered onion rings we ate during the movies... It was no damn secret, but by the time National Geographic photographs a GDU bag on the ocean floor containing a load of crushed beer cans we'll all be dead, sitting in Hell, telling each other lies and reminiscing about those great onion rings we had watching *'Gunfight at the O.K. Corral'* for the tenth time.

If anyone tells you they rode smokeboats and didn't eat like a king, check his ass for surface ship tattoos and run like hell... Anyone that full of shit is likely to explode. .

The Take from a Trash Dumper by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

It is hard to imagine in this day and age, with all the high visibility of our submarine force, that there was a time when we were a 'silent service'. It wasn't necessarily by design. It was just that nobody gave a damn. It was a time when boat service officers didn't spend a whole lot of time in 'high collar whites' and raghats could be found topside on a summer day in a red lead spattered t-shirt, cut-off dungarees with high top tennis shoes, or Mammy Yokums... The Marlboro behind the ear was optional.

There was no public relations problem because the only public we were having relations with were barmaids and professional ladies. The navy kept the raggedy-ass smokeboat navy out of sight. Nobody ever wrote anything about post-war diesel service.

It was a time when the world's attention was totally focused on the gee whiz nuclear navy. Nobody gave a damn about a bunch of idiots riding obsolete boats that didn't have a Chinaman's chance in hell of surfacing at the north pole.

Considering the negative focus and scrutiny of our undersea naval force today, being out of sight may not be a bad thing.

The shame of it is that 99.9% of our submarine operations are uneventful, highly orchestrated and professionally executed operations. The sad thing is that the high-visibility course that the navy has adapted to 'sell' our need for state-of-the-art submarines includes having our great commanders chauffering gaggles of visiting businessmen to and from the ocean depths.

On the old smokeboats, we never had to wade around knee-deep in goofy tourists in our control rooms... We were not plagued by distraction. We did our jobs and left an unheralded, unparalleled record of trouble-free operation.

We were proud... We were lighthearted. It WAS a pride-filled life. We were not blessed with the level of technology that came later. Most of what has been automated in the boats of today, was done manually and required your constant attention. When you were at diving stations, you kept the boat at depth. You sat on a padded metal locker and spent hours holding a wheel the diameter of a bicycle wheel and watching a depth gauge.

When you got good, you could actually feel the sea reacting to the fine adjustment of your movement of the planes. You could anticipate the reaction to your movements and keep the boat within a foot of your ordered depth. I have difficulty imagining it any other way. I can close my eyes and still feel the sea through my hands.

We had to jackass our torpedoes into the tubes. We had to run them in by hand. Wrestling the big monsters took sweat and muscle, not to mention some of the most original cussing ever conjured up in the mind of man. Don't feel sorry for us, for it is a loss of something that made us what we were... A team. A bunch of shirtless, sweat-soaked sonuvabitches cussing and running fish into the tubes. It was a tough time, but it was a good time. Actually, the best time. You were part of a crew... Not just any 'crew', but a gahdam family of undersea brothers bound by a concept and a tradition. You were needed. The ship needed you... The skipper needed us all. Even the 'lowly' lookouts (aka 'trash dumper' material, remember?) were the 'eyes' of the boat when we ran on the surface. When it came down to the final analysis, you eyeballed everything - contacts, surface conditions and targets... We had good eyes.

We weren't slaves to our equipment. We didn't sit around playing nursemaid to technology. If it didn't work, we took over and did it manually. That is what good submariners were trained to do. It is what separated a qualified man from trained monkeys.

We were it... One crew. Nobody took over our boats when we came in. When the old girl went to sea, we were there. The same names, same faces, same officers forward. If someone failed to maintain a system or piece of equipment, the Chief of the Boat knew precisely what butt to put his boot into when ass-kicking time rolled around.

Those were great days... Didn't know it then, that came later... Much later. We knew that the nuclear boats represented progress but we didn't think much about it. At nineteen, I'm not sure it's possible to understand the concept of 'future', 'mortality' or 'finite tomorrows'.

We could see the future of submarining floating in the after nest. The big, fat black monsters getting all of the attention. High speed, deep-diving ugliness rapidly sending our smokeboat fleet up the river to the scrapyards. To us, nuke boats were like

elephants... They were big as hell, uglier than sin and none of us had any idea what went on inside of the damn things. They were just there.

In the ensuing years, I have never really connected with the nuclear navy... Probably because I haven't got the knowledge to make the connection. I share no common experience with what came after. If the Wright brothers met John Glenn in a bar and got to talking, once they got past the dynamics of 'lift', I don't know that they would have a helluva lot to talk about. The folks who write history swept diesel boat accomplishments from '45 to '70 under the rug and moved on to the sexy stuff.

We were too busy punching holes in the ocean and fixing up the 'hole-puncher' to notice.

So when an old smokeboat sailor who never made the transition to nuke, reads about all the monkey business going on with the nuclear navy, he has no point of reference. Only a sadness that the reputation of the force he loved has been tarnished and the wizards who are at the helm of the public relations effort, don't seem to be that gahdam bright. They sure have made a mess of things.

The clown who came up with the idea of turning our warships into Disneyland rides is a certifiable idiot. When it operated at its best, the 'Silent Service' was just that. The men who fathered our service understood the value of mystery and that the keeping of the veil of secrecy made those who wore Dolphins a very special bunch.

I have no idea what it would take to rehabilitate the public's perception of our submarine force. Stop running into stuff at sea would appear to be a good idea. Quit pulling off it's panties for public 'See What I've Got' show and tell sessions would seem to be another good idea. Explaining the concept of 'silence' in the service and the already proven benefits of the policy to the chowder-headed bastards wearing gold shoulderboards, might be helpful.

Little children... Tiny kids, want mommy and daddy to "come see the potty I just made" before they flush it. Somebody needs to tell the submarine force commanders to just flush the gahdam things... The public doesn't have to see everything.

And last, quit trying to market submarine defense value... The nation has been sold. In fact, with the saturation of '*Mr. Boomer Goes to Sea*' TV programming lately, the public relations effort may go sour and bring on boredom.

But, what the hell.

You know what the advice of a trash dumper was worth... One hundred twenty-four bucks a month, plus sub, sea and foreign duty pay.

The Gift of Common Memories by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

When old submariners get together, they invariably play the "Anyone remember?" game.

"Anyone remember that little Sonarman from Oklahoma?"

"Hey, anyone remember that barmaid in the 'Blind Tiger' who had the big tits?"

"Anyone remember that JG who busted his leg clearing the bridge?"

"Anyone remember that shit that the cook used to make with beans, cheese and mushrooms?"

We tossed our gear in the lucky bag, pocketed our Dolphins and took away a heartload of memories. Submariners are forever bound by common memories.

Memory is the mastic that holds us together.

Tradition by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

It was tradition... Back then, we valued tradition. It connected us to those who had gone before... Especially the giants who fed Hirohito a steady diet of Mark 14 warheads. We were very proud of being the down line recipients of the legacy they passed on to us. Pinning fish on a wet shirt was a ritual that was a bright link in the chain of the continuity that was the history of the submarine service.

The rationale for the elimination of the 'wet shirt' tradition, as explained to me by a very professionally correct and obviously responsible nuclear submarine officer, was that it involved silly, unnecessary and easily avoidable risk. Sounds right... Only one problem...

American boys of an earlier generation grew up climbing trees, shooting each other with Daisy 'Red Ryder' B.B. guns... Jumping off garage roofs and playing with fireworks one level below nuclear ordinance. Risk was an integral part of the excitement of living.

The acceptance of risk was a primary attraction of the mystique of submarine life. The pressure of seawater on steel hulls at depth has always held risk. People who want to avoid risk, become typists in the Ohio National Guard... They sure as hell don't sign up to ride worn out, World War II submarines.

USS Kittiwake, the old 'Kittycat' by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There's no lad who was a non-rated idiot in Subron Six who, when he thumbs through

his Pier 22 memories, doesn't smile when he remembers the Kittiwake. Any man who rode the Kittiwake pulled his time on a good ship.

She was our auxiliary submarine rescue vessel, or ASR. An ASR is the equivalent of a neighborhood fire house for submariners... These were the guys who came to get you if you bottomed out somewhere between the surface and crush depth. Any man who says anything disparaging about a Navy Diver, should have his gahdam tongue cut out and nailed over the urinal in the nearest submarine bar. I never met anyone off an ASR I didn't totally respect. I'm sure they must have had one or two who didn't rate it, but I never met them... They must have kept the bastards locked up in the jerk locker.

When you didn't have the duty and you were Mexican peon-broke... Just shuffling wallet lint with nothing to do... You went grasshoppering to other boats in the squadron.

If it was Sunday morning, you could roam down the pier and request permission to board Kittiwake. If someone gave me a choice between breakfast in the main dining room at the Waldorf Astoria and Sunday morning chow aboard Kittiwake, I'd say,

"Screw the Waldorf Astoria."

First place, I doubt they would allow you to enter the dining room in a fancy hotel wearing paint splattered dungarees, for starters... And they wouldn't have a cook wearing a sweat-soaked T-shirt with a tattoo of a nekkit lady wearing a raghat and neckerchief with 'Subic 38' over her, chewing on a cigar and saying,

"C'mon kid... Hell, you gotta be hungrier 'n that..."

And tossing 3 more link sausages on your plate.

"Jeez cookie, I'm no damn hog... Go a little lighter on that."

"All you pigboat sailors is hogs... Who you tryin' to shit? I wouldn't live on one of them floatin' hog wallows if they paid me CNO pay."

"Get outta here... We get free North Atlantic trips in the winter and coffee that'll float a brick. What else could you want?"

"Regular showers and no roaches."

"Can't have everything. Hell, we've got roaches that can sing and dance, play the violin and pass the Chief's exam."

"Are you gonna stand there and shoot the shit all day, or move on and let some working men get fed? Here son... Have a banana... The sonuvabitch'll put hair on your chest."

Best breakfast you can find anywhere on earth.

The coffee tasted like fresh-ground coffee smells... Pitchers of ice cold milk... Best damn scrambled eggs this side of the Pearly Gate guard shack and link sausage that had to be made out of ground up bubble dancer butts. I'm getting hungry just thinking about it.

You give an ASR cook a carton of sea stores smokes every now and then and you have a friend for life.

"Hey cookie... Anyone ever tell you you're a great stew burner?"

"I ain't your gahdam mother... Stow the horseshit. You ain't been in the Navy long enough to begin sweet-talking your elders. Now shove that chow in your face and clear the deck, kid."

It was like a trip to Grandma's house. Made you feel loved... Wanted... And all warm inside.

"Hey cookie...wanna git married? I'll buy you an engagement ring."

"You want me to crawl over this gahdam steam table an rearrange your gahdam dental work? I haven't got time to put up with wiseass crap."

"Anyone ever tell you how pretty your eyes are when you're angry?"

At some point you recognized it was either knock it off or die.

I think his name was Rogers. I asked him why he never made Chief. He left home and lied his way into the Navy at fifteen...There was the Great Depression going on. His old man was having a helluva time feeding six or seven kids, so he never finished school. He had no technical ability, so they sent him to cooks and bakers school. He got sent to the Far East and wound up on some rust bucket in China. He spent the war tossing chow down bluejackets in the Pacific, maxed out the campaign stars in his Pacific Theater ribbon and got the Purple Heart when a Jap pilot flew his flying bomb into his messdeck off Okinawa. He finished the war in a Navy hospital in California. When they started kicking guys out after the war, they kept the regulars from the '30s. He made third class in '47. He said they gave it to him as a booby prize after he failed the exam six times. He married some bar fly... No kids... Got divorced. Made second class in the early fifties while cooking on NATO staff and first class on a minesweeper. He had no ties anywhere and he could pack all his earthly belongings in a seabag. His life ambition was to have enough money to bankroll a greasy spoon somewhere near Boston. I sure hope the sonuvabitch realized his dream. He always lit up when he told me about it.

That old smiling cook was a dues payer. He owned a part of the flag he served. He was a major participant of the best part of the Navy I loved and remember. If Arliegh Burke ever met him, he would have made the old bastard a Chief, simply for duty faithfully performed. A lifer... One of those guys that had U.S.N. written all over him, and a dinged

up spatula with the edge peened over from whacking out scrambled eggs for hundreds of thousands of servings.

After chow, me and Stuke would go back with the messcooks and lend a hand until all the pots were hung up and the dishes were racked. Then, the old cook would grab a butt kit... Go park himself at a mess table and read the leftover Sunday paper a steward brought him from the O.D... One that had wardroom jam prints on it.

"Cookie, tell us about this café... If me and Stuke show up whatcha gonna have?"

"First, you gotta have a perky-titted waitress. You can serve guys warmed over dog crap if a good looking honey hauls it to 'em. You don't want to get some starry-eyed dolly who's savin' up for beauty parlor school. You want to get some gal who'll be with you twenty years and still be good looking wearin' one of them old lady load bras and support stockings... And you've gotta have a Mexican dishwasher.

"The place is gonna be in a friendly part of town. Place with a lot of Irish folks and old people. Irishmen tip big and old people show up regular like... Secret to feedin' old folks is chewable food and checker boards."

"I'm gonna find one of them neighborhoods where little kids come by askin' for pennies to shoot the gumball machine and in hard times, the guy who reads your electric meter don't read so good on purpose. Serve mostly burgers... Fries... And three kinds of pies. You serve more and folks can't make up their mind... Chili and chowder in winter."

"Not gonna cheat on the burgers... No sir, none of that additive crap. Pure beef, heavy as a link of anchor chain... Say, what are you kids doin' hanging around here for? Why don't you haul your damn dumb butts back to your boat? Can't you see that a senior petty officer is trying like hell to read his gahdam paper in peace? Get the hell out of here and stop asking so many stupid questions."

So we left the old ragged bastard with a head full of perky-titted waitresses, Mexican dishwasher, cheating meter readers, coots playing checkers, and his anchor chain burgers.

I hope someday there's a headstone in a National Cemetery somewhere for him that shows he made Chief and has 'World War II' on it... And kids who got gumball pennies pass by and remember him.

Like I do when I think about the old Kittiwake.

The World by the Tail by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Why would anyone want to be a career E-3? What kind of a nickel-plated idiot would

want to be an ambitionless jerk at the bitter end of the submersible community anchor chain?

We got more fresh air and sunshine than the poor bastards confined to the inside of the pressure hull by virtue of their acceptance of increased responsibility and the burden of leadership.

I had no little lady at home to chew up a pay allotment... No little kiddies that needed to be fed, needed shoes or Weekly Reader money. While responsible boatsailors were attending parent-teacher conferences and attempting to find the psychological reasons that little Sally was eating her crayons, I was parked in Bells... Butt-buffing a barstool, polishing off a pitcher of suds and dining on gourmet food like Slim Jims and Beer-Nuts.

In short, it was wild oats sewing time. To really sew wild oats, you have to be a worthless sonuvabitch... A hardworking, dependable, loyal worthless bastard. The Leading Seaman was a tailor-made position for a lad who liked to bust his butt then toss on a set of dress canvas and piss away his base pay on wine, women and juke box tunes. Besides, I was Adrian Stuke's understudy and Stuke was the all time 'King of Lunatic Behavior' and God's gift to every goodlooking single female located between Hudson Bay and southern Chili. Stuke set an unmatched standard... I never reached his stratospheric heights... But, dining on his leftovers was enough to keep you broke and up to your neck in enough hot water to keep you 'lobster-hide' red.

When you made E-4, they took away your sunrises and sunsets... Petty officers were relieved of lookout and topside watch duty. The gahdam submarine force confiscated your daydreaming and diabolical plot formation time... Just up and highjacked your 'stand out in Mother Nature's weather' time.

Acceptance of a crow meant that your dates with warm, tropical rain soaking your dungaree shirt and watching sea birds soar over the bridge got few and far between. Watching porpoise chase your bow wave like the friendly neighborhood puppy chasing the mail truck, became a thing of the past. Cups of coffee laced with North Atlantic seawater shared with men who would become life long friends, would get lost... Spray painting the old girl during the first night alongside... Stealing crap off the tender... Getting first crack at the morning doughnut delivery... Giving the deniable finger to the tender quarterdeck weenies... Herding drunks... Sharing a cup of bottom of the pot coffee and a Marlboro with the Duty officer topside on a star-lit night... Watching the damn kaki-sacking shore duty bastards parade their perky-titted honey's up and down the pier and getting to watch heavy duty naval hardware churn up and down the Elisabeth River... They took all that from you when they tossed your worthless ass in the below decks watch trickbag.

The Wardroom was more tolerant and forgiving of E-3s... They expected you to be stupid, dumb idiot bastards and we rarely disappointed them.

Dolphins were what mattered...The bastards treated you like Gunga Din before you got them, then adopted you blood brother style once the old man pinned them on you. Hell, it was like a tent meeting 'Come to Jesus'... You got religion, redemption and the right to read *The Sexual Escapades of Swamp Woman* if you could find all the loose pages.

As an E-3, you could hang around the messdeck and piss off Chiefs... Who felt everyone should be engaged in some kind of productive work 24 hours a day. To an E-3, a pissed-off Chief, raging about the Old Navy, where all the men devoted their spare time to knitting hawsers and making periscope lenses out of mayonnaise jars, was E-3 entertainment. I found that nothing in the Navy matched a red-faced Chief with veins bulging out of his neck, telling an E-3 what a good for nothing sonuvabitch he was and giving you a lecture on how your choice of reading material would rot whatever was left of your miniature brain.

"How in the Hell can you subject yourself to mentally digesting that garbage?"

"Chief, guys on nuke boats read stuff about quantum physics, great literature, philosophical bullshit, and stuff like that... Smokeboat sailors are prone to gravitate to studies of nympho behavior and large scale depravity of Amazons with abnormal chest dimensions."

"Dex, I hope you have a rich uncle who dies and leaves you ten or fifteen million or you're gonna starve to death, you worthless sonuvabitch."

It was nice knowing there was someone truly concerned about your future welfare. It gave you a warm feeling all over... That warm and fuzzy E-3 feeling.

You got to messcook. I learned the art of peeling potatoes... I'll bet I carved the hide off fifty tons of the damn things. Nobody can go through mashed potatoes like the animals who rode diesel boats. You could get your arm jerked out of the socket going for a bowl of spuds... Table manners were alien to messdeck protocol. If you want to replicate the smokeboat dining experience, toss a bunch of ripe bananas in a cage with a dozen or so gorillas.

Being an E-3 was a way of life. You could cross the tender quarterdeck wearing shoes spattered with zinc chromate, a tee-shirt that looked like a locomotive wipe down rag and a white hat that looked like the inside of a coal bucket... Give a J.G. a heart attack and turn a Chief Bo'suns Mate into a drooling maniac and all you had to say was,

"You guys got any good D.C. stuff in your lucky bag? I think I'm about due for an oil change."

If I want to drift off to sleep, all I have to do is think back to days in the shears... Looking aft at 'full on four' smoke and twinkling phosphorescent water sliding aft and cascading off the tanktops, and remember the gentle roll the old girl gave you on a balmy night. The bullshit conversation of Adrian Stuke as we passed contact lights to

each other as they moved across fore and aft... Nights spent watching to raise the lights on the Chesapeake Lightship... It was like mother leaving the porch light on for you.

Those are E-3 memories. E-4 memories are about hauling coffee to the Chief parked on the hydraulic manifold, giving the Old Man his eight o'clock report and lining up to blow sanitariums.

Who in the hell would make that trade-off for access to unbridled power and greatness? Neither Stuke nor I could afford a John Paul Jones gene implant.

But one day, I woke up to find Adrian Stuke wearing a Quartermaster crow and my world crumbled... Adrian Stuke had abandoned me and become a philistine.

I felt like the last guppy in the pet store fish tank.

Give the Boatservice Back Tradition

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Someday, the submarine force will find a leader who will have the insight to recognize the wisdom of returning a lot of the lighthearted tradition and give back some of the little things that meant so much to the old tattered foul weather jacket and raggedy dungaree force.

A good beginning would be to return the tradition of never pinning Dolphins on a dry shirt. It was a good tradition... Oh yes, I know the arguments against the tradition... Safety... Unnecessary risk. In the world of grown men... Adult, red-blooded bluejackets, that rationale is pure bullshit. The foundation of all military service is risk... The acceptance of risk in selfless service to one's nation. Tossing a lad into the ocean he lives in, involves minimal risk. Hell, strap a lifejacket on the lad. The honor of this baptismal ritual and the effect it had on a man's personal pride and his entry to ship's company and the fellowship of proven submariners, far outweighs the risk.

If you want boatsailors to reenlist... To remain for career service... You must give them back the cocky pride that once was ingrained in the men who wore cloth Dolphins just above the cuff of their right sleeve.

That can be done... It would take one hell of a force commander but it could be done.

First, de-emphasize all the personal benefits of specialized training as enticements to retain boatsailors and instead emphasize the brotherhood of undersea service. Riding heavy steel under the sea is the common denominator... Being taken in to that brotherhood used to be all that mattered. Wearing 'twin fish' over your pocket meant that you measured up... They marked you as a man apart... An accepted part of a very elite Naval Force... They made you special.

In the old days before the wholesale proliferation of all the meaningless bullshit pocket hardware that the Department of Defense uses as bribes to make kids appear to be warriors... The golden calf icons of mediocrity that get handed out like Crackerjack prizes that mean nothing... The lads of today know in their hearts that they risked nothing, dared nothing and sacrificed nothing for 90% of the meaningless chest jewelry they wear. Quit treating men like children and handing out toy horsecrap. All that the men of yesterday required was the privilege of serving in submarines.

There is something wrong with a military force where peacetime junior enlisted personnel wear more ribbons than a field grade officer who fought from North Africa to the Rhine. It is a silent insult devised and perpetuated by small-bore command leadership to diminish the deeds of the giants of what Tom Brokaw has termed 'The Greatest Generation'. The desk bound public relation hacks have missed the mark. By inflating awards and turning American decorations to ticket punch milestones, everyone got shortchanged and brave men whose valor was rewarded with the decorations that have become travel souvenirs, got their pockets picked by the feather-merchants who piss on the tradition of hard men who rode armed ships in defense of what they believe in.

Let sailors go back to crushing wings in their goddam white hats. Who in God's name came up with that toilet bowl roll white hat crap? They ought to find them and hang all of them up by their heels.

I see ships returning from overseas deployment and the bluejackets lining the rail looking like the navy has parked bidets on everyone's head... Give the lads back that seagoing cocky crushed white hat... The one worn by men that threw heavy ordinance, went in harms' way and won wars.

The world once witnessed proud American sailors rolling down streets in foreign ports with white hats rakishly cocked over one eye with a set of characteristic port and starboard wings... His wallet clamshelled in his waistband and his pack of Luckies tucked in his sock.

The brass will puff themselves up like a mating barn owl and say,

"The United States Naval uniform is not meant to be a vehicle for personal expression and individual affectation."

Horseshit.

It used to be. It set us apart from the chickenshit regulation of the other robot handpuppet forces. Sailors never took a pee by the numbers or spent a whole helluva lot of time memorizing Rockettes routines. It was a force of extremely proud, highly competent individuals who took pride in buying tailormades and looking like a damn sailor was supposed to look.

You've gotta ease up on the lads today... Give them back that means of self identification. The poor bastards look like some toy manufacturers idea of what a sailor should look like or what some fashion designers imagined our navy should be wearing. Navy leadership should remove anyone from influencing naval uniforms who never woke up in a stretched canvas rack six hundred plus nautical miles from the nearest deep water port. Any idiot who never wore snug-nut skivvies and thirteen-button bell bottoms shouldn't be allowed within ten miles of any decision on raghat uniforms.

Next, you must reconnect present-day submarine sailors with their heritage. I have talked with a number of lads riding today's technological marvels. Most of them feel no connection with any non-uranium powered submersible.

We were fortunate. We shared mess tables with the boatsailors who rode boats under Lockwood, skippered by the meateaters that destroyed more enemy ships than any American sub sailors before... Or since. They handed us our heritage... Our birthright as submarine sailors. In those days heritage was passed from the barnacle encrusted bastards to the next generation in sea stories told over coffee.

That can't be done today...

The old 'Dead air and seven knot submerged' bastards are gone. There are no more pre E-8 and E-9 red hashmark Chiefs... No guys who listened to fifty pound TNT packages detonate and bust up crockery, gauge faces and hull packing. They are history... Rickover relegated the sonuvabitches to the pier dumpster for obsolete gear.

I know that the lads who make up the crews of those two hundred yard, high speed automated undersea luxury liners look on smokeboat sailors as Neanderthal relics, but like it or not, they are downline links in the hundred year chain of submarine history.

Some submarine force commander is going to wake up one day and have the spiritual revelation required to give our submarine history to our fine sailors of today. You say,

"How in hell could THAT be accomplished?"

Simple really... The History of the force exists in books... Film... Logs, records, diaries and in the graying heads of the men who lived it. The men whose deeds gave us our proud legacy.

With minimal expenditure and use of limited manpower resources, the United States Submarine Force could prepare a series of underway lectures... After chow... Talks to be read by junior officers when the boat is underway. A gentleman by the name of Theodore Roscoe wrote a book about *Submarine Operations of World War II*. Simply reading from that book would connect today's submariners to a very important part... The most important era in our history. The book should be a part of every boat's library the day she's launched. They spend zillions on subs, so a fifty to sixty dollar book that can be obtained from The U.S. Naval Institute in Annapolis shouldn't knock a helluva

dent in the developmental piggy bank... The return on investment would be measured in improved pride, elevated morale and warrior spirit.

We diesel boat sailors had little or nothing in comparison to today's crew comforts taken for granted by today's submariners. But we had deep pride in what we were a part of. We didn't share our boats with follow-on crews. We were the boat. We owned our hull number... Every bolt, rivet and packing gland... And every rust stain that ran down our superstructure.

Let us pray that some saltwater admiral turns up someday with a set of deep submergence cajones and sends the word to every boat in the force to the effect that all this Top Gun, Navy SEAL horseshit is about to take a backseat to the tough seagoing bastards that make up the community of undersea sharks. He is going to elevate the visibility of the U.S. Submariner to the point where eight-year old boys want to grow up and get on a bus to New London.

Hey, I'm just an old worn-out E-3. Nobody in possession of his right mind would listen to an After Battery Rat... But if I was SUBPAC or SUBLANT, I would (a) find out what Art Smith, Ron "Warshot" Smith, Roy Ator and Capt. Slade Cutter eat for breakfast and serve it every morning and (b) I would buy Tommy Cox and Bobby Reeds's 'Brothers of The Dolphin' CD and play the damn thing every morning on every boat in the fleet until every lad knew the words by heart... And could sing it in any bar on the globe. And I would play that song at 0600 every morning at New London at a decibel level over outdoor speakers that would knock every sonuvabitch at the Coast Guard Academy out of his rack. Hell, I would have noise pollution guys from the E.P.A. skydiving on the base with tiger nets.

That is one of the many reasons that the people up forward rarely sought advice from idiots aft.

But seriously... The boatservice became a dysfunctional family when Rickover's boys started considering the gravel gut service to be 'The other side of the tracks'. Officers never saw that, but we sure as hell did.

We can change that... All we have to do is do what raghats do best. Look on each other as shipmates and take back our deeply meaningful history and tradition that link us in the tightest brotherhood ever created. If you wore Dolphins 'once upon a time', then join the United States Submarine Veterans, Inc. (click on the link) and show your support for the lads riding steel ships under the sea in selfless sacrifice in defense of this fine nation. They are our legacy.

Salt Water and Cheese Sandwiches by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Everyone reading this stuff may not have experienced the absolute joy of riding a fleet

boat on the surface in a sea state above state four. I'm an old coot so if I repeat myself chalk it up to the onset of senility.

There is no amusement park ride that can come anywhere close to riding a smokeboat with green water coming over the bridge. If you like giration insane motion, God gives it to you big time in the North Atlantic... Unlike thrill rides at amusement parks, it didn't cost anything and could last a couple of days.

It came with foam-capped swells the size of small town office building that bounced a boat around like a tick on hula dancers butt. The pleasure of being damn near beat to death by pinballing off bulkheads and valve stems is one that current members of the Silver Dolphin society may never know.

Modern submersible craft, as I understand it, operate at extreme depths where there is absolutely no turbulence and crewmembers can stand a dime on edge on a mess table and it will remain undisturbed for days at a time.

Not so smoke-belching boats.

We spent a good portion of our boat service enlistments doing the northern latitude two-step, dodging gear adrift and zinging off a multitude of inanimate objects. We didn't know you could get Dolphins any other way.

There is a majesty to heavy seas. It would be damn near impossible for a man to witness the raw power of heavy seas and remain an atheist. Only God could unleash that kind of unrestrained wildness.

One minute our bow is pointed skyward... The next, it is buried in a forty-foot swell and water is pounding through your limber holes, crashing up through the slots in your forward deck and smashing up and over the bridge. "Rid'em cowboy"... It repeats and repeats. Accompanied by 14-degree lateral motions.... Figure eight stern gyrations and little unexpected Cha-Cha dances thrown in by the Devil just to make life interesting.

Inside the boat, grown men are tossed around, Illicit storage falls out of vent lines and the meals become an endless succession of gahdam cheese sandwiches, coffee or bug juice... And it becomes damn clear why Uncle Sam forks over sea pay.

Imagine Arnold Palmer teeing off and driving a golf ball in a tile shower stall and you will have some idea what the inside of a diesel boat felt like being pounded by ton after ton of raging salt water.

"Roll you rust bucket, roll"

"Pitch you sonuvabitch, pitch"

Over one and under one... Your gahdam fillings get loose... Your pocket watch hops out... Your smokes take wing... Guys shoot their lunch... Roaches do flips for no sea pay... Cooks cuss... Guys in racks who are dying to take a whiz ask themselves,

"Do I rally want to work my way to the head and watch a guy toss his cookies while I attempt to pee in a moving target?"

Over the 21MC comes "Stand by for heavy rolls to port!"

What the hell, do we have a choice? Are heavy rolls to port different from whatever has been going on for the past six hours? Have I been missing something? Is there anything left in the overhead vent lines that need to hit me in the head?

Will the cold air tornado coming through the ship from forward every time the conning tower hatch is opened become a tropical breeze?

Will the guys coming down off the bridge quit dripping ice water on sleeping guys as they take their soaked foul weather gear to the engine room to dry it out on the Fairbanks covers?

Will the Goddess of the Main Induction show up and park her warm fanny under this freshly stolen blanket with me?

Will Hyman Rickover come get me and save me?

No. All what "Stand by for heavy rolls to port" means is that all the shit that flew by you heading in one direction will be reversing course and putting knots on your head from the other side.

"The evening meal will now be served in the crews mess."

"Hey Johnson... You know why they don't send donkeys to school? 'Cause nobody likes a wiseass!"

"Dex... Do you think it's cheese sandwiches?"

"Does a hobby horse have a hickory dick?"

"Hey you guys, you ought to go back to the after room and listen to the rudder rams... Sonuvabitches are going nuts... Who's got the helm?"

"Don't know, glad it ain't me."

"Will be, next watch."

"Not me, I going to strike for corpsman and sit in the messdecks the rest of my career and eat cheese sandwiches."

"How in the hell did I end up in the gahdam submarine navy? Nobody said anything about seagoing vomit barge."

"Hell...you know you love it...where else could a hayseed from the hillbilly hills with the I.Q. of a fly get rich throwing trash in the ocean for a living?"

"Hey Stuke... You know why they don't send donkeys to school?"

"Yeah, yeah."

"Hey ladies knock it off... So grown folks can sleep."

And so it went...stuff banging around in side lockers, ceramic dishes rattling... The acrid smell of gastric dissolved cheese sandwiches mixed with what had been last nights coffee.

People stumbling around zinging off bulkheads, watertight doorsills, piping and each other and being eighteen years old and finding out the guy at the recruiting office who promised a thrilling life of wonder and adventure was a lying, shore duty sonuvabitch.

The Men who followed Old Gringo by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Call 'em snipes... The black gang or just plain raggedy-ass enginemen and motor macs. Every boat had them and they had the roughest job in the Navy... Two miles ahead of whatever came in second. We never told them that... We would never admit that being an 'engine house mouse' made you King of The Jungle.

I was a torpedoman. We worked with tools, enginemen looked on as toys...

"Hell, the guy who fixes my watch has bigger tools than you loafin' bastards."

If I heard that once, I heard it five million times. It was true. They had stuff back there that you could have used to perform a hysterectomy on The Statue of Liberty. Hell you had to be one helluva man just to pick up some of their tools.

The words 'light' and 'delicate' were meaningless terms to an engineman. They wrestled junk the size of railroad locomotive wheels. My memory of them always brings back laughing guys. Oily rags and greasy bloody fingers wrapped around coffee cups... Cussing inanimate objects that were misbehaving.

They worked the hardest... Earned their pay twice over and in a world of generous, good-hearted men, were themselves, the most generous.

They also were loud... Damn loud. Hell, you spend your life buttoned up with a couple of 1600 HP Fairbanks Morse rock crushers pounding in your ears, waddya expect? They make gahdam soccer balls out of bull hide thinner than enginemen's' eardrums. Oilers and throttlemen could whisper and be heard in a sawmill.

Nobody in his right mind tangled with the 'heavy wrench mafia'. They traveled in pairs and to them punching your nasal cartilage out the back of your skull would have been light work. When you gave them hell, you smiled so they would let you get away with it. Your worst nightmare was a pissed off engineman with Dolphins.

They drank coffee out of the dirtiest cups I ever saw. If you came into the crews mess and saw a cup with greasy fingerprints all over it, you didn't have to confer with Dick Tracy to know some engine house animal had been there... All enginemen blood was three quarters Maxwell House and the rest cheap whiskey.

When a snipe came to the bridge to air his armpits, you knew you were going to get a lecture on loafing, fresh air topside life. When you are King of The Jungle you eat monkeys for breakfast... Enginemen dined on messcook and lookout butts.

All Old Gringo and the Teenage Throttle Adjuster have to do is jump in and you know heavy objects and bar furniture will be thrown, so tape your Blue Cross card to your chin before you attempt to throw your first punch. There is a lot of fun in pinning the tail on Old Gringo's donkey, secure in the knowledge that he can't throw a 2,000-mile haymaker.

We had an engineman who was prototypical of the breed. He was built along the line of King Kong and had the social grace of an orangutan. He was called John T.

When the Salvation Army got rid of unusable clothing... Stuff nobody would buy at a thrift store, they would boil it and bale it up as 'sterile rags', and sell the bales to the Navy for engine wipes. Amazing things came out of these engine wipe bales. Once an engineman turned up decked out in coveralls from a Cadillac dealership.

But the worst sight we were ever called on to witness was John T. waltzing into the crews mess wearing a red polka dot sundress and yelling "gangway for a fifty-dollar whore!"

Every engine house on every smokeboat in the navy had a hidden jug... Or jugs. The guys that designed pigboats provided numerous places where an oily rag-wrapped fifth could be secured for sea.

I was hundreds of miles from the source of all distilled spirits when I passed final quals... After all the guys from ships company had congratulated me, I turned in to a rack in the alley. I had just drifted off when someone shook me. I wiped the sleep out of my 'what the f*ck?' eyes, when I see four greasy snipes.

"Dex, the exec said you sneaked through."

"Yeah, got my fish."

"Congratulations you gahdam, obnoxious little bastard."

Someone handed me a dirty cup full of liquid that could have dissolved a lug nut...

"Dex, welcome to the qualified world."

Without enginemen, we wouldn't have pulled away from the pier. They were the heart and soul of every submarine.

Nuclear propulsion is clean and quiet. I suppose that is a good thing... Progress. But it is not necessarily a good thing. No enginemen with dirty fingers... No lousy coffee cups and no loud talking, good-natured men who would unselfishly give away their worldly goods for the sake of a shipmate in need.

I would miss that ... I would miss being able to work my way aft after a wet night in the shears and toss my soaking gear over a hot engine cover and swap a couple of dirty jokes with the good natured bastards who lived there.

I would miss knowing what a man who calls himself Old Gringo... A man who rode S-boats... Knows what depth charges sound like... Wore cloth dolphins and still leaves large footprints in the jungle... Did for a living. I miss the fact that because of generational separation... Gringo and I never got to share a cup of coffee and swap a few lies while his engines steamed the saltwater out of my bridge parka. That boys and girls, to me, would be a keeper memory.

Hop Sing, Fortune Cookie & Piss Ant

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In the movies, you see the scene where all the ladies in the remote jungle village congregate on the banks of the local creek... Do the wash by banging it on the rocks... Laughing and exchanging gossip.

On Pier 22, that was Hop Sing's laundry truck. Everyone knew that Hop Sing was a colonel in the Chinese communist intelligence community... The name on his truck was 'WAN-HO CHINESE HAND LAUNDRY... NO TELEPHONE' It actually had 'No Telephone' painted on the side of what was known as Hop Sing's mobile spy wagon. We called him 'Hop Sing the Button Crusher' and his lovely bride was known throughout Squadron Six as 'Four-tooth Fortune Cookie'... Or just 'The Fortune Cookie'. And they had a goofy kid who bummed chewing gum and LifeSavers we called 'Piss Ant'... Hop Sing, Fortune Cookie and Piss Ant... Wan-Ho Hand Laundry... No telephone.

Hop Sing could bust buttons at a rate that must have required a lug wrench or sledge hammer. The only way your dungaree shirts could survive the Wan-Ho laundry process was have a seamstress at Bells cut the sleeves off to short sleeve length... Turn your iron-on rate into a cigarette pocket... Cut the shirrtail off and hem the thing so you didn't have to tuck it in... And sew up the front so it became a pullover. This 'smokeboat fashion statement' could make a Master at Arms give birth to a three-toed sloth.

“Heello, my name not Hop Sing... Submarine mans call me Hop Sing... My name Wan Ho... Also not 'No Telephone Ho'... Submarine man tell much lie... No serious no time... Always laugh... Make joke. Not funny joke... Stupid joke... Submarine man no serious, just always make joke. I say, 'Why submarine man always be much dirty? Tender man always clean.' Submarine man say, 'Tender man always be lazy... Sleep all time and be much worthless sonuvabitch... Tender a floating fun house... Nobody work... Dress in clean uniform and go to circus all day... Eat Crackerjack and see surface craft officers do dog tricks.' Submarine man say AS-18 stand for amusement ship for 18 year-old loafers... Orion man say submarine man all full of shit... Submarine man don't know real truth, ever.”

“Submarine man always call wife 'Fortune Cookie'... Not name fortune cookie... One time wife go make phone call to pay phone next to Quonset hut where is all hydraulic oil... She gone far away... No can hear all bad submarine mans... Submarine man say, 'Hop Sing, is true all oriental women have cross-ways vagina?' I say, who say that? Sailor say Encyclopedia Britannica, whatever that is... Must be problem in South Chinese place... Never see such thing.”

“One time submarine man say, 'Mr. Chopstick man, you put starch in skivvies one more time, I take you skinny ass and bury you in parking place say 'NO PARK, SQUADRON COMMANDER' and me spend eternity look at staff car oil pan.”

“Submarine man call little number-one son 'Piss Ant'. Always give piss ant chew gum and candy... Also give him sailor hat say PISS ANT on front.”

“Mans who ride submarine boats never have two same names in any laundry things. Mans say all names fool Russians to think submarine boats have 600 mans. This is lie... Submarine mans steal all times... Go to sea... Only mans to steal from each other... All submarine mans crooks.”

Hop Sing knew the operating schedule for every boat on the East Coast. This little guy was wired. He could drop little bundles of straight-gauge poop that would have amazed the Chief of Naval Operations.

“No take Requin man laundry... Just sit in truck two weeks... Requin go sea... Make lots ping time.”

“Where'd ja hear that you little sawed-off rice-eater?”

“Wan got sources... Wan in the know... Wan no bullshit, you bet!”

“Wan gahdam chink spy, you bet!”

“Wan no spy... Wan got sources... Wan listen all time... Not all time talk silly bullshit like submarine man.”

“Wan a damn communist intelligence man... Wan commie spy... Wan major pain-in-the-ass butt-red weasel!”

“You dirty, smell bad submarine man!”

Who knows what Wan was. To us, he was Hop Sing the Button Crusher, married to Fortune Cookie, mother of Piss Ant. You couldn't help but like the little sawed-off sonuvabitch. He was one hundred percent dependable... Rain, shine, tornado, major flood or catastrophic quake... The Button Crusher and his Second Fleet Spywagon & Laundry Truck was at the pier head.

“Hokay, hokay... You get in line and have pay money ready or no get clothes... I got all day... You got morning quarter in thirty minute... I no care... I call ship name... You say ‘Yo’... I say fie dollah... You say, ‘Here is money’... Me take money, give you laundry... Requin no bring laundry no more until you get back from north run.”

“Northern run!! You better be pullin' my damn chain you little slant-eyed sonuvabitch!!”

Stuke, Master Bullshit Magician by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Okay Stuke, now that you are giving away Cold War liberty secrets, I'm gonna give away one of the best ones you cooked up.

In the late '50s, they made the former skipper of the Nautilus... The guy who took her to the pole... 'Nemo' Anderson... Emperor Moonbeam, an admiral and he went to the Med and became COMSIXFLEET. This 'God's Gift to Brilliance' came up with a screwball liberty policy whereby all non-rated men had to be back aboard ship by midnight. He lost his 'Nemo' name and became 'Cinderella' Anderson, the idiot that invented Cinderella liberty... Too damn much nuke on the brain did the bastard in.

As a wierd byproduct of this idiot's lunacy, the great minds at the helm of our naval forces started making petty officers sew their gahdam crowns on their peacoats so the shore patrol vultures could snap up E-3s.

To counter this, Adrian Stuke invented the *Portable SP Masquerade Pack*.

Here's how you do it... All E-3s take note. First, you appropriate an 'SP' armband. If you are so stupid that you don't know where they are, go to the yeoman's shack and you'll

find them in a box in his safe, next to his secret stash of skin books. You can get two by trading a couple of real juicy skin novels and an I.O.U. for a pitcher of beer. All yeomen work side deals... All of 'em do it. They invented hocus-pocus.

Once you have your 'SP' armband, have a naval tailor seamstress sew a crow (a second class crow works best) to the back of the armband so that you can only see the tips of the eagle's wings at the top and about a half-inch of red chevron at the bottom.

To any half-wit, shore duty, sleepwalking shore patrol, you are obviously a petty officer assigned to the shore patrol... A brother Gestapoman... A member of the most worthless bunch of sonuvabitches on earth.

You can sign for shipmates, round up stray drunks and watch E-3s run like hell for the midnight launch. You are bulletproof and you will find that most hookers get real lonely when the last midnight liberty boat clears the pier... And competitive prices for cohabitational recreation become highly negotiable.

I don't think Adrian Stuke ever took out a patent on the 'Instant Promotion Magical SP Armband' so you can mass-produce them for your entire squadron.

If you get caught, tell 'em you are a JG with ONI... At two in the morning, the shore duty brain is so slow and muddled in coffee that the sonuvabitches will buy just about anything.

If they still don't believe you, tell 'em to phone Stuke. He'll come up with something... He always did.

Maybe someday, Stuke will tell how to steal an officer's hat with scrambled eggs on the visor and how you can put it on... go out in a naval shipyard and get giant cranes that pick up whole battleship turrets, to come and help you load cases of beans and toilet paper.

Just another in a long line of the 'Kid from Quincy's E-3 Labor-Saving Hints'.

Pier Dollies by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I guess to normal folks, that would appear to be a derogatory term. Then again, normal folks didn't ride diesel-powered submersible iron septic tanks. The women who waited loyally in all kinds of weather, at all hours of the day or dead of night... And smiled and waved to welcome you home, were collectively known as 'pier dollies'. Any smokeboat sailor who doesn't have a special place in his heart for our beloved pier dollies... The same women who waited rainy night after rainy night for 'their boat and their sailors', is a coldhearted rascal.

Pier dollies were... And always will be some of God's finest work. What made them so wonderful was their devotion, loyalty and the ability to stand on a lousy navy pier in weather unfit for dogs, Marines and anyone in France. They never broke faith with the ship and her crew.

They came in a variety of types from devoted officer's wife to professional 25 & 7 working girl... PTA regulars and old barmaids fighting cellulite and varicose veins... From starry-eyed sweethearts to veteran submarine wives who had met enough incoming boats over the years to know that all you get at 2:00 AM after all lines have been doubled up and liberty goes down... Is a smelly guy who stinks of diesel and hydraulic oil... A sack of disgustingly dirty laundry... And a raging erection looking for a home.

Maybe all this has changed. Maybe the Salvation Army and the Singing Nuns meet the boats that throw their heavies over in the middle of the night... Who knows?

The old expression that all boatsailors used,

"Ain't nobody up this time of morning but burglars and bad wimmin..."

Didn't apply to pier dollies. They were saints.

There were gals who used to call SUBRON SIX Ops on the Orion... Get your ETA... Then drive out Willoughby Spit to Fort Wool and sit there drinking thermos coffee, waiting for an old rust-stained smokeboat to come churning past Thimble Shoals light.

As you passed Fort Wool in 'balls and brass monkey' weather, in the pitch black darkness someone would yell up to the bridge,

"Hey Stokes, flash an Alpha-Alpha over to Wool."

You would hear the shutters on the signal light bang away and see the light reflections in the rising and falling swells. Then you would see the dual flash of automobile headlights that told you several cars would be pulling into the gate at DES-SUB piers and parking in the pier head parking lot. One guy's wife told us she could sit out there at Willoughby Spit... Listen to the radio... Read a paperback book and breast-feed a kid, all at the same time. We never could have won the Cold War without gals like that.

It's nice to be remembered. The lousy part of being a gahdam boatsailor was that nobody knew where in the hell you were or what in the hell you were up to... And probably wouldn't have given a good gahdam if they did. But pier dollies did and there is something wonderful about standing topside waiting to toss a heave to some half-asleep sonuvabitch on the deck of the outboard boat in the nest... And seeing the smiling face of a devoted fan whose panties past experience told you... Were taking a rest break in the glove compartment of a 55 Chevy that needed new tires. Little unsolicited gifts like that made life worth living.

If you got in at a decent hour... 'Decent hour' defined as 'Before Thelma secured the beer taps at Bells'... You could take a dolly or two up to Bells and treat them to a gourmet meal of Slim Jims and Rolling Rock... Breakfast of Champions.

Pier dollies had the straight skinny on the information that E-3s needed... Sports scores, what the new cars looked like, baseball scouting prospects, and what supermarkets were running beer specials. The vital intelligence for anyone who parked their boots in Hogan's Alley.

I have always been disgusted with anyone whoever looked down their nose at a pier dolly. Those wonderful women were the closest to angels I've ever been next to. Where in the world would you be able to go and find a smiling, big-busted bleached blond who would sit in a car for two hours just to wrap her arms around a foul-smelling line handler, standing under a dim pier light in a drizzling rain? They were saints and they were truly glad to see you at a time the rest of the world cared less what you were up to. They gave or sold at reasonable rates, unreserved, no bullshit love, to guys who weren't exactly prize packages.

A whore can sell her wares without stepping over fuel hoses and ration boxes on a cold pier at 2300 Zulu. You can bet your thirteen-button blues on that, horsefly.

I am damn near sixty years old and no one in my life ever welcomed me and made me feel ten feet high and bulletproof like those gals did. In my book, they are and always will be, shameless gals who did a helluva lot more in Cold War service than a lot of the worthless sonuvabitches out there taking all the bows.

And you returned to the boat... Dropped below, your foul weather jacket reeking of dime store perfume... Cheap red lipstick smeared ear to ear all over an unshaven face only a mother could love... And the coffee tasted great and all was right with the world.

Sure, the little woman out in the kitchen fixing your dinner would never understand. She never lived on the snorkel for weeks at a time in a forgotten world. But you did... We did. And the world was a better place when there were women who waited to welcome worthless bastards on the bitter ends of heaving lines.

My idea of heaven is a mental picture of Saint Peter on an ivory pier standing up to his armpits in the middle of a bunch of perky busted pier dollies yelling,

"Put your lines over when you can."

If any woman reads this who ever stood out there on a dark pier waiting on incoming smokeboat bluejackets, God bless you, darling..

Twin Fish by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

What do they mean? What was their value? And what did you get with them? Those sterling twin fish in your cufflink box... Those tarnishing sardines that last saw a set of dress blues forty years ago.

You can become a paratrooper in three weeks... It takes 15 working days for the United States Army to be convinced you are stupid enough to jump out of a plane... Do it five times and they pin a badge on you.

It takes a little longer to become a SEAL. The Navy puts SEALs through incredible lunacy for six or eight weeks and develops a tribe of real meateaters... Guys that on any given day could eat King Kong's lunch... Guys that can rip your heart out right through your rib cage with two fingers. Guys that can live for months on nuts and berries. Folks who can be parachuted into Banglabookistan and shoot their way in and out of the sultan's harem if the CNO's wife needs silk panties for a White House dinner. But they get the badge in two months.

I have no idea what it takes to get Air Force enlisted crew wings. I do know that I never saw any airman crawling out on the wings, whacking them with a chipping hammer. And planes don't stay up long enough for the ice to melt in the beer coolers in trunks of their cars. They have wonderful geedunks and enlisted clubs that should have a cover charge. And none of the sonuvabitches have the slightest idea what its like to pull in from three weeks on the snorkel for a weekend of loading stores, topping off fuel tanks and finding out their girl is being paid a visit by the Goddess of Ovulation.

It was damn tough to get Dolphins. At least, it was for this idiot. I learned more mechanics and physics in less time than anyone could have convinced me I was capable of. I learned stuff a high school teacher couldn't have taught me at gunpoint. If I had had any idea how many alligators there were in the Dolphin pit, I would have probably joined the Texas National Guard like George Bush Jr. and become a PX commando.

But when they pinned those fish on a kid the crew had just tossed over the side... A kid who stood aft of the sail dripping wet with a four-foot smile... They changed my life. I became ship's company. I became family and forever linked with the community of undersea warriors.

Ron Martini and his BBS has conclusively proven that there is no expiration date on Dolphins. I don't think the man fully comprehends the full impact of the magnificent treehouse he has created for guys with Dolphins hiding in their sock drawer... In a year, he has handed me back my youth. Ron Martini and Ray Stone have introduced me to a game that all it takes is a pair of Dolphins to play... A game where you can always count on someone trumping your ace and kicking your butt, all at the same time.

A place where when you are full of crap, a respected friend will tell you in no uncertain terms. It was like that riding the boats and nothing has changed.

When I first met Ray, I never fully appreciated the impact he would have in dredging up long dormant memories. He said,

"Dex, do you get on Ron Martini's BBS?"

I had no idea who Ron Martini was, but I figured he must be the inventor of better bullshit... That's the only 'BBS' I could figure submarine sailors would be involved in.

My wife still has the first personal e-mail I got. It came from Old Gringo... She reads it from time to time. When I read Tom 'Old Gringo' Parks' website and later *Pig Boat 39*... I felt unworthy of recounting my insignificant years in boat service. I wouldn't have made a good pimple on Tom Parks, Ron Smith or the two Harrison's butt. I know if I ever forget that, I'll be one deluded sonuvabitch. Those gentlemen paid dues when the price of dues paying didn't come cheap. I wore the 'no personal risk' Dolphins whose respect was earned by the all or nothing risk-takers, that too came with Silver Dolphins... The acceptance by men who were drinking mid-watch coffee, breathing lousy air and sending Nips off to Buddah in highstakes package deals when I was wearing three-cornered pants and hammering dents in my high chair. That shipmates, can be very humbling.

When Bob Harrison was gravely ill... I didn't want to go out on the internet and bring up Martini... I didn't want to read that a man from whose pen flows some of the most poetic and meaningful prose I have ever read, had 'rested his oars'... I didn't want God to rest his writing arm. There are so few places where you can go these days and read thoughts formulated in a manly, unabashedly patriotic heart. Bob Harrison gives you that and your day is a little brighter, a little better knowing he is still out there. The prayers of those who wore Dolphins gave us back this fine gentleman and sure made my bride a happy gal. She is a Tom Parks and Bob Harrison fan... But is in love with Cowboy. I'm holding down fourth place and fading... Billy Bob is pushing me to fifth.

It all came to me because of that sonuvabitch rear admiral Thomas M. Dykers and his Silent Service televised flypaper. That guy has no idea what he gave so many of us. We should dig him up and kiss him.

Silver Dolphins. For \$3.50 you could get a cheap pair at Bells Bar & Naval Tailors... Blue box... Cellophane window... Gemsco Dolphins.

If you were an idiot E-3, you knew how to take 'em between your thumbs and forefingers and bend them into the proper curvature to pin on a D-cup bra. But what you didn't know at the time was that that little blue box contained an invisible tradition that made you a part of something so wonderful it would take you a gahdam lifetime to wear it out.

Radiomen by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In the old gravel-gut boat service, your only link with the civilized world was via the radio shack. A cubby hole on Requin aft of the scope wells in the control room... It was the home of the spark shufflers.

If you were in tight with a radioman, you could get ball scores. Sewer pipe sailors lost touch with the teams they followed... A hazard common to submarine sailors and people who take a moon walk and miss the ride home. Actually, we lost touch with just about everything. In the war movies when they come across some guy who claims to be an American, they ask him questions only an American could answer. If they had picked me up and asked me anything but (A) The names of Roy's and Gene's horses (B) Who won World War II and (C) Blaze Starr's bust size, I would have been one 'up the creek' sonuvabitch. Hell, we didn't know Jack Kennedy was the president until we snorkeled a day later.

Only a complete idiot would make a bet with a radioman. Chances were, the radioman had the final score before you tossed your wampum on the mess table.

I remember one great night brought to us by the spark pushers in the radio shack.

We had finished whatever nonsense they sent us out to do and were making turns for home. The Old Man opened the showers... Guys were bumming razor blades and rooting around in side lockers for something that would pass for a towel. Next thing you know, the foo-foo juice came out. Now there's a myth that all smoke boat sailors eventually bought into, sooner or later... Aqua Velva was never meant to disguise poor personal hygiene. No matter how much of the stuff you poured on a dungaree shirt you had been inside of for two weeks, you were still one disgustingly foul smelling sonuvabitch. You could spray French perfume on an engineman with a fire hose and buzzards would still circle around the bastard when he went topside. But I digress...

A group of us were sitting around in the crew's mess drinking coffee and ragging guys heading fore and aft. A radioman came in and told us we were in for one helluva good laugh. He monkeyed around with the RBO and patched it into something in the radio shack.

For those of you who never had the pleasure of riding diesel boats or other seagoing steel-hulled garbage scows, I must explain something here.

You could make phone calls from a ship at sea. Here is how it worked. The radioman would raise someone ashore called a 'marine operator'. Then the radioman would give the marine operator the name and phone number of whoever the bluejacket aboard ship wanted to call. The marine operator would then place a collect call and when the party answered and accepted the charges, the marine operator would form a radio link with the ship and 'Bill the Bluejacket' could talk to his sweetie.

From sweetie to the marine operator was private and confidential... From the marine operator to Barnicle Bill, it was up for grabs... Great evening entertainment.

"Poopsie, is that you?"

"Yes ducky doo, it's me."

"You miss me, peach blossom?"

"Oh yes... YES, darling!"

"Miss me a lot?"

"Oh, I miss you soooo much I can't wait to hold you and..."

"Okay darling... Are you going to meet the ship?"

"No sweetheart, I parked the car in the pier head lot... Keys are under the mat."

"Why aren't you meeting the boat, sweetheart?"

"Oh, it was supposed to be a surprise... If you must know, the kids are spending the night with the Webbers. I bought a new nightie and I figured we'd break it in tonight."

The animals would cheer,

"LET'S HEAR IT FOR MAMMA AND HER NEW NIGHTIE!!"

And so it went. Bluejackets phoning in after six months in the Med... Great entertainment.

"Darlin' can't wait... Just you and me and a can of Crisco!"

We heard it all... It was great... Laugh after laugh. A very memorable evening... Best and cheapest fun we ever had on Requin.

There were times... Moments that we took for granted and that passed with little notice. It's funny how they come back late in life when you have the time to reshuffle your memories... The collected moments that constitute your life.

Radiomen linked us with the world. Another thing we just took for granted and that was so damned important looking back. Never thanked them... Should have.

Great guys, all of them.

Submariner's Girl II by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

When we were kids watching cowboy movies and Dale Evans turned up, we would put our hands over our eyes and say,

"Oh no! The mushy stuff."

This one is the mushy stuff. I have a permission slip signed by Bob Harrison.

All stories of young love begin with some wonderful moment in time where two people meet... Fireworks go off... Angels sing and bluebirds fly merrily overhead. To be truthful, I can't remember exactly how we met. She'll most likely pin hell on me for that... But I just can't remember. If she says God delivered her to me from the clouds wearing nothing but a smile and a big red bow, I'll have to take her word for it. My brain cells are 'cashing it in' at a much faster rate than hers.

Where can I begin? One minute I was a free spirit, swinging from limb to limb... I had arrived at the eleventh grade with no particular goal in life but to spend the remainder of it eating regularly and not having to sleep out in the rain. You could summarize the entire scope of my long range ambitions on the back of a pack of book matches. Anything farther down range than next Wednesday was well beyond the outer limits of my comprehension.

Susan Elizabeth just showed up in my life and started to take care of me and let me kiss her. I don't know why or when it happened, but it did... And I've been grateful ever since.

One minute I was an 'untaken care of idiot' and the next I was a regular at her family dinner table... And stretched out on her sofa with my head in her lap eating fresh popped popcorn and watching Gunsmoke... Matt, Doc and Miss Kitty.

Sue was always soft, pink and smelled good. She was smart... I wasn't. She was pretty... And she was all mine. In the '50's, girls would become 'all yours' and for that you got to feed them at the local drive-in and shell out for movie tickets. If you were lucky and the theater was dark enough, you could be allowed a combined twenty minutes of 'arm draped over the shoulder breast massage'... Or at least until your arm went to sleep and your fingers died. If God had allowed young lads to write the plans and specifications for the perfect girl, she would have looked and behaved like Sue.

Our drive-in was 'Tops'... Tops Drive-In, home of the best damn double patty cheeseburger ever made... 'The Sirloiner'... These were the days where they ground up real genuine beef... No additives... No left over shoe leather... Soy meal... Styrofoam chips... Gun wadding or other wierd stuff. Just ground-up good parts of a cow.

The rival to the 'Tops' Sirloiner' was the 'Hot Shoppe's Mighty-Mo'... Both had secret sauce. I would do an abnormal sex act to know how to recreate 'Sirloiner' sauce. The

bad thing about youthful memories... When the stuff goes it usually takes everything with it.

The Hot Shoppe also turned out a ham sandwich on a twisted roll called a 'Teen Twist'... They quit making stuff like that. Orange Freeze... What in the hell happened to the Orange Freeze? Don't say 'Slurpee'... I'd rather boil my socks and drink the result.

I remember a blue sundress... Light blue and white gingham check dress with a low scoop bodice that let the wild Indians view the trade goods. Thirty-six 'D' wonders upon which many vision re-runs played across the back of my eyeballs when plowing invisible holes in the North Atlantic. She was one lovely girl.

Sue could cook... Really cook, not just zip the lid out of a can and warm up the contents. Sue was a damn good southern 'scratch cook'. Lucky southern boys end up with scratch cooks. The ones that do spend the rest of their lives smiling and bragging. My mom was as good as they came when it came to scratch cooking southern style and so was Sue's mom, Grace. One of the greatest memories I have of my high school years were wonderful moments of laughter and great food shared with Susan Elizabeth and dear Grace at the family dinner table. Also, sitting on the concrete back porch steps sharing coffee with wonderful Grace waiting for Sue to return home... And necking with Sue in a straight-across front seat of a '57 Olds convertible. Ten minutes worth of what we spent hours doing would kill me today.

I have never actually figured out who to blame for my naval service... Rear Admiral Thomas M. Dykers, USN (ret) or Susan Elizabeth. Sue liked boys in sailor suits... Being a boy, I just went to get me a sailor suit and wound up in Subron Six. That's the way things work when you are eighteen and have no clear direction in life. 'Cute in a sailor suit'... Jeezus, was that one helluva deal.

When most girls come to realize that Mr. Bluejacket 'Cute in a sailor suit' is going to have his fanny parked in a steel seagoing loony farm and that it is going to be a long time between free hamburgers and bra hook manipulation, they find another source of amusement. John Q. college guy... Mr. Cool at State U... Mr. 'I've got cash, a gas credit card and wall-to-wall unaccounted for time' crawled out of the woodwork and became your stand-in.

The inevitable letter read,

"I know you will understand... I met this really neat guy. He's a junior at Dickey Doo Tech... He's studying braille gynecology and lets me help him with his homework. I'm sure you will find yourself another girl more suited to your unique lifestyle."

Sure... Twinkle Toes, the duty barmaid.

But if you were lucky... Damn lucky, you had a Susan Elizabeth... A gal who would drive two hundred miles to spend thirty minutes on a cold pier just to hold hands and tell you

she was proud of you, and didn't mind all the separation... And let you louse up her lipstick and get the smell of her perfume all over your foul weather jacket.

And she wrote letter after letter. Blue stationary... Always light blue stationary... Beautiful, delicate letters and addressing... Prose that put lightning bugs in your heart and kick-started many a dream. Great letters. Never could find the words to thank her for all those letters... For taking the time from her very active life to write to an idiot riding an old, wornout smokeboat.

Things happened and has been the hallmark of my life, I was to blame and I lost her. Somewhere there is a place where all the good stuff you lose in life goes... I must have one helluva pile by now. If 'failed relationships' go there, I probably hold some kind of inter-galactic record... But the one that hurt the most was Susan Elizabeth.

We both got married, raised good kids and stayed in touch. Our spouses have shown remarkable understanding and we do talk by phone often. She still lets me slip an occasional 'frog down her bloomers' and I love the fact I can still make her laugh. Making her laugh used to be my full-time job.

Then I wrote *Pier Dollies* and when I spoke to her on the phone, she wanted to know if she had been a 'submariner's girl'... Resulting in a story about her.

In the story, I mentioned her picture that I wedged in a side locker frame. It was her senior class photo... One of the wallet-size ones. She cut her hair so she could have bangs... Grace went nuts... Totally jumped the reservation. For once, I kept my mouth shut... I liked the picture, but when lovely Grace hit the warpath, she didn't take prisoners... She left dead guys snorkeling around in her wake.

I loved that photo... Sure looked at it enough. She looked best on a two engine snorkel charge when you had time to crawl in your rack and look at those magic lips.

On the phone, I asked if she still that photo somewhere.

"Yes somewhere, but I'm not sure where... I'll look for it."

"Well peach blossom, if you can locate one, mail it to me and I will have it copied and mail it back to you."

She looked for two months with no luck. I gave up... Then one day, an envelope arrived. The dear sweet lady had cut the page out of her senior yearbook and mailed it to an old worthless sonuvabitch she once loved.

I copied it and if you ever want to know what a real boatsailor's sweetheart looked like... She looked like this.



She could wrap her arms around a grinning, foul smelling idiot wearing paint spattered, acid eaten dungarees... Mammy Yokum boots and a face that hadn't been next to a razor blade in weeks... And make him feel like the master-at-arms in the Sultan's harem.

Soft Rag Hats and Faded Dungarees

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There were thresholds in time... Milestones you never recognized until years later that marked the progress of those who today call themselves veteran smokeboat sailors. Men who became ships company in petroleum powered submersibles with hull numbers that mostly started with numbers below the mid 500 range, will remember.

By the time the Old Man pinned Dolphins on you, you had gone through at least one pair of Mammy Yokums, your white hats weren't boot camp stiff anymore... You knew what a peacoat button popping off and hitting a bar-room floor sounded like... How to fold the jacket inside out on the inside and zip it up to tuck under your head when you crawled into an empty rack... And you owned faded dungrees.

By that time you had a nickname.... "The Chinese Whore", "Wingnut", "Fly", "Doc", "Rat", "Hobo", "Dipstick", "Yo-Yo Man", "Crunch", ... You remember. Hanging nicknames on each other was a baptismal necessity for acceptance by boat sailors.

Prior to pinning on your silver fish, you had probably dirtied up five or six aprons messcooking and either dumped ten tons of leftovers in the ocean or jackassed them to a pier dumpster. You had stood a couple of hundred topside watches and ridden herd on several hundred returning drunks. You had written "All lines secure, moored as before" a million times in a green cloth covered book, ... Consumed enough coffee to float your tender, and taken enough late night pees on the screwguards to qualify you as a division landmark... The seat of your liberty whites had butt-buffed every horizontal surface at Bells Bar to include the bar counter, the pool table rail, tables, benches and the top of the juke box... You had figured out that the only way you would ever be able to hold on to a gahdam watch cap was to go to the small stores on Orion and buy two for every sonuvabitch riding the boat...

Experience had taught you that stenciling your name on stuff meant absolutely nothing in the submarine service. Your high school had told you that in communist countries nobody owned anything. Everything belonged to everybody. Hogans' Alley on Requin must have been a hotbed of closet communists. Back there everyone's gear was up for grabs... To include racks and blankets... With the exception of a thriving blackmarket in sidelockers. When anyone got orders and shoved off, vultures stood by with master combination locks to homestead vacated real estate.

It was impossible to hold onto paperback books. If you fell asleep reading page ten of a Harold Robbins' novel, you woke up to find it had developed legs and walked off. It

would show up two months later in the after battery head tucked behind the Yarway levelometer guage.

By the time everyone on the boat owned at least one of your original black sock issue, it was perfectly legal for qualified men to kill, cook and eat non-qualified men for a variety of infractions not specifically enumerated anywhere in the known world. And if a non-qual ever changed the station on the RBO, when a bunch of old coots were playing Acey-Deucey or Hearts, he could be crammed into the GDU and shot out.

You learned that there was a helluva lot of stuff about the submarine force they forgot to fill you in on at New London.

You had discovered that when a Chief started with,

"Back when I qualified..."

You were in for thirty minutes of total horseshit about the days when Noah packed diesel boats with two of every kind of animal he could locate, to include one that grew up to become a Chief Petty Officer.

You had actually witnessed men, selected for their sharp minds, the elite of the fleet, open beer bottles with their teeth and spit out the cap. You had learned that bad Chevron packing could be taken care of with wire and a number #10 can... Checked regularly to keep the Atlantic Ocean from running into your side locker and lousing up your cigarettes... Or you could stow your Marlboros in a water proof container and say to hell with it.

You could look at the Watch, Quarter and Station bill and see your name five or six times with lines drawn through it where the COB had bounced you from deck force to messcooking a couple of times. You had learned that being allowed to use the officers head in the forward torpedo room during battle stations did not automatically improve your I.Q or put you in touch with the big picture... It just meant that your butt had been in direct contact with the world of forbidden pleasure...

And you had hung around the brow a number of times waiting for a departing shipmate to arrive topside hauling all his earthly goods in a canvas bag, just so you could tell him good-bye, shake his hand and tell him to stay away from naughty girls and the nuclear navy... And you never knew how much he meant to you at the time.... Or the number of stories you would tell on him in years to come.

And things happened. Your rag hats got soft... Your dungarees faded... The cuffs on your foul weather jacket frayed... You figured out how to sew buttons back on your peacoat... And that hot coffee with a little North Atlantic from water over the bridge was not half bad and that you had become a blood brother in a tribe of idiots with whom you would be forever linked.

The Brotherhood by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

They were three hundred eleven feet long, carried a full compliment of seventy two enlisted, eight officers and smelled like the inside of a locker room at a coal mine.

They were fleet boats. By 1959 most of them had gone through so many conversions that they were like a hundred and five year old bubble dancer who had had twenty or thirty tit augmentations, a couple of dozen face lifts and a handful of nose jobs. Requin had undergone a torpedo room hysterectomy when they made her a picket boat and she got a whomping big fiberglass fairwater when they converted her into whatever she was when I rode her.

They mounted a thirty-six transducer hydrophone array below the bow. I think the navy just had the thing hanging around and they bolted it on the old 481 because they needed the warehouse space. Floating crap in the ocean was hell on 'chin mounts'... And Requin whacked into everything bobbing around out there, from Halifax to Bolivia. The navy took the deck guns off after the war. The theory being that the only thing a smokeboat could out-gun would be the Staten Island Ferry and a Coast Guard cutter in dry dock. It seems that from 1941 to 1945 the meat-eaters who rode submarines would surface and duke it out with stuff up to and including the size of light cruisers.

Recognizing the mentality of diesel boat skippers, The Navy was faced with the choice of removing the guns or finding gentle, sensible diesel boat skippers. They removed the guns... Non-aggressive boat COs are as rare as Dutch virgins.

By the time I rode them, our main battery topside was apples and oranges... We would throw three apples and an orange for a tracer. Things grow old... Submarines are no exception. The nuclear navy was bright shiney and new. They were driving the Rolls Royces of the fleet while we were riding high milage model 'A's, full of dents and road wear. Our boats had histories and a record of proven reliability.

None of us ever fully understood our role in the big picture of 'Naval Defense'. It looked like our mission consisted mainly of hauling malfunctioning motion picture projectors around in the ocean, in addition to being ambassadors of athletes foot and collecting whorehouse intelligence for Squadron Six. If we did anything else, they kept it a secret.

We weren't mentioned in the book *Blind Mans Bluff* because outside of providing some Whiskey class Russian subs a few laughs, we didn't do a lot of gee-whiz stuff and all our Cold War victories were gin mill brawls. We may have held the world record for littering the ocean with one and two-way trash, and bug juice consumption. I know we still hold The Guinness Record for ratty foulweather gear and chipping hammers accidentally lost over the side... Chipping hammers that made an accidental splash a good seventy five feet aft of the screw guards.

It was the era proceeding something called the 'Don't ask, don't tell policy.'
Hetrosexuality was established when some drunk would stagger off a bar stool and yell,

"ANY BOAT SAILOR THAT CAN'T TAP DANCE IS QUEER!"

And five or six dozen fellow inebriates would jump up and go into mystic gyrations that immediately established that their preference was still packaged in lace panties and that Gene Kelly shouldn't feel threatened.

It was a time when submarine sailors wore silver Dolphins and no two pieces of clothing having the same name stencilled on them.

A time when shore patrols asked,

"Sailor, where's your white hat?"

And a perfectly good answer was,

"An elephant ate it."

We were invincible. Being invincible, you never grow old.

It was a time when Tom Clancy was still burping pablum and taking leaks in three-cornered pants, and Admiral Burke owned us all.

And it was all long ago... And someone stole our invincibility and we grew old. So damn old, that the only entertainment we could conjure up was poking horny toads down the poopy suits of nukes... And baiting them into taking a swing at a sucker pitch. That and calling our urologists for Viagra to boost the hydraulic action of the gear we tap danced for.

But we had each other. Late in life, technology we have yet to fully understand, allowed us to locate the rascals we shared bad air and saltwater with so we could lie to each other and recall the days when we wore the rough edges off the raging tigers of youth and earned now tarnished Dolphins.

We got fatter... Uglier... Ornary'er... More worthless and not a helluva lot smarter. But we never got so damn stupid that we couldn't recognize that when it comes to underwater activity reporting, CNN tosses more crap than a John Deere manure spreader.

As I said, we have each other and a seabag loaded with memories. In my case, absolutely worthless memories of an obnoxious kid at the lowest end of the naval food chain who contributed nothing to the luster of the service that made him a man. Where else but in the company of the men he loved and was loved by, could he be accepted and revalidated and be allowed to chronicle his pain-in-the-ass adventures in 130

bullshit-packed installments and not be tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail?

Love you guys... Did then, do now. And when I wrote that, I was tap dancing.

The Bridal Suite by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

If you ain't an old smokeboat retread, skip this one... It will mean absolutely nothing to you. But if you rode the old 'Make your depth six-five feet and report your leaks' oil-fired, rock crushing submersible looney bins... You'll remember.

The bridal suite. Two overhead racks suspended below the forward room torpedo loading hatch. Home of the officer's stewards... On Requin, it was two Philipino stewards mates who lived up there. 'Q'... Full name something like Emilio Gonzales Juan St. Something or other Jose De Fuerra Quesada... 'Q' for short. The sonuvabitch had a name so long, he would have had a manhole cover for a dog tag. The other little guy's name escapes me.

They were affectionally known as 'Big Monkey' and 'Little Monkey'... There was no such thing as any form of what is now known as sensitivity on diesel boats.

One night, four of us were playing Hearts for smokes and ragging the cooks. 'Little Monkey' came aft, broke out a skillet, sliced up a banana, and pan-fried the sonuvabitch in some kind of wierd oil somebody mailed him from wherever home was.

"You like mon... Good shit... You like... Everybody like... Good shit... All people like."

I would have just as soon taken his word for it, but the little insistent rascal wanted us to try this delicacy he had whipped up just for us.

He passed around a Pyrex plate piled up with little crisp things that tasted like poker chips cooked in Lucky Tiger hair tonic... I ate three. All three reappeared later when I was standing lookout. The last thing I saw of Little Monkey's 'good shit mon' was seeing it splattered all over the 481 hull numbers illuminated in the glow of the starboard running light.

Monkeys One and Two had a kingdom all their own... The Bridal Suite. You had to be a member of the ape family to get up there. No normal human being would do it. First, it was damn near impossible if you didn't have claws and a tail... And second, you could get a nose bleed from the altitude.

The stewards used to get a jump from the toehold they got from the inside dogging gear on the forward battery watertight door. Then they would hop on top of the NAVOL monitor, do some kind of orangutan flip and end up in their rack. Watching them get into the bridal suite was better than a trip to the circus.

They hauled all their crap up there. Paperback books... Letters... Photos of their ten thousand close relatives... The world's largest collection of individually blessed rosery beads... A can wired to a bunk chain with a collection of old, stinky cigar butts... Flip flops stuck in between the lower rack wire and the mattress and four or five sour towels that made the air on level with the lower escape trunk hatch, smell like the lower flats of a kitty litter box.

And two gahdam ukelalies.

The bastards played ukes... Jeezus, did they play the damn things. I never recognized anything they ever played and no torpedoman forward ever did, either. I'm not even sure it was even music... More like stuff they whipped up on south sea islands when they boiled people in pots... Or some kind of Tahitian mating ritual dance. What it was, was obnoxious racket with words nobody understood. You listen to five minutes of that crap and it became very clear why the Old Man kept the small arms locked up.

When you loaded fish or had to rig the collapsable frame (strongback) for deep submergence, you had to drop the two racks. When you did, crap fell out all over the deck... Stuff you had never seen in your life... Letters... Yellowed copies of the Manila newspaper... Occupation money... Calendars from home a couple of years old...Uke strings in cellophane packs. I wouldn't have been surprised to find Amelia Earhart falling out of those bunks. They had everything.

Big Monkey was a kind of amateur barber. He charged two-bits to give you something remotely resembling a haircut. He had a very dull set of clippers... When 'Q' cut your hair, it felt like fifty or sixty rodents were making a meal out of your head.

I was aboard when Little Monkey qualified. No one in the United States Navy worked harder for Dolphins than he did. As a steward, he didn't have to qualify... But being a part of ship's company was his dream. The qual board and the officer who took him through the boat were amazed at the knowledge he displayed. He was good... Very good.

He had made very good drawings of everything. I had never seen all of his drawings... None of us had. He had a stack four or five inches high... Very detailed. Every man who took the time to take his drawings and take a good look at them, felt humbled by the effort he had put into them. The COB called me into the Goat Locker and said,

"Dex, take a look at these damn things."

He had them rolled out on his rack.

"Did you know he was doing this kind of work? I didn't know the little sonuvabitch was this talented. To be honest, we all took the little guy for granted... Never paid attention to him like we should have. He told the qual board he had been a third year engineering

student. Dex, Little Monkey gave us all a wake up call and a lesson in what it means to be a shipmate."

"Damn Chief... Did Little Monkey do all this by himself?"

"Damn straight, horsefly."

Then, the Chief pointed out little notations penned in at the edges of each drawing... 'Armstrong help me... Show me this.' 'Badertcher show me...' 'Stuke show me all salvage air...' 'Mr. Schilling tell me this.'

When I read Kipling's Gunga Din and read the line,

'Though I've belted you and flayed you... By the living God that made you... You're a better man than I... Gunga Din'

...I instinctively think of Little Monkey.

We all pitched in and bought Little Monkey a set of those Balfour sterling silver Dolphins. The Old Man pinned the standard set of Gemsco Dolphins on him and then the COB stepped forward and handed him the box with the Dolphins from the crew in it.

That night in Bells, Little Monkey became one of us... He was proud.

"Ask me anything... I tell you anything on boat... Study hard... Know all boat... You ask anything... I show you... No Santa Claus Dolphins... Real 'Know the boat' Dolphins... You ask... You ask anything..."

"Little Monkey, anything?"

"You ask Little Monkey anything... I tell you..."

"What in the hell did you fry those f-cking bananas in? Damn near turned me inside out."

The Common Denominator by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

If you worked for Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey at any time in your life, you were always circus people. Din't matter if you set up the tent, showed up to shovel zebra poop or were the ringmaster... You were always 'circus people'. You knew the language of the circus... The secret handshake and how elephants smelled.

Same with boat sailors. From mess cook to the skipper, you were submarines... You were always a boat sailor... It came with Dolphins.

My wife met me after I rode the boats. She knew nothing about my service days because the only evidence left by the time we married was an old, tarnished set of Dolphins in my cufflink box... A cherished photo in a silver frame of our skipper, Cdr. Edward Frothingham and my old foul weather jacket that my new bride kept trying to send off to the Salvation Army.

In 1991, I found out that the Requin was in Pittsburgh. I told Solveig that I wanted to see it again... But I realized that it would mean very little to her. So, I decided to take her to New London, the Vatican of Undersea Warfare.

Not wanting to drive a helluva long way to be turned away by some jarhead at the gate, I phoned the base. I got some operator who didn't know where to route the call. The next thing I knew, I was talking to some four-striper.

"Sir, I know you're busy. They should have connected me with your 'stupid questions' J.G."

"I don't know... What's your question?"

I explained that I was a qualified diesel boat sailor. I emphasized that I was NOT an officer... In fact, I had spent most of my tour as one of the lowest life forms in the submarine force. I told him I just wanted to see the base once more.

He asked,

"Do you still have your Dolphins?"

"Yes sir, sure do."

"Did yours come with an expiration date on the back?"

"Expiration date?"

"When you go home tonight, check your Dolphins and if there is no expiration date on the back, you are still as valued by the submarine force as you were the day we pinned them on you. We will expect you and your wife at the main gate at zero eight hundred on such and such a date. Plan to spend your entire day with us."

That conversation validated the brilliance of the decision we all made to ride the boats. They treated us like visiting royalty.

That night, at the Mystic Days Inn, for the first time my little blue-eyed Norwegian recognized that twenty-five years earlier, the fellow she had married had once been one of a special band of men.

I'm sure somebody did something so evil they took away his Dolphins but I never heard about it. It's like a girl giving up her virginity... Takes place once and the condition lasts a lifetime. Dolphins are unique.

Officers get gold Dolphins. If you wore gold Dolphins, you must set an example... Never admit that you know games of chance take place on board... That cross-pollination occasionally took place on the bridge on duty nights... And you never stood topside watch. You lived in a nice residence and could afford personal transportation.

Enlisted men get silver Dolphins. If you wore silver Dolphins, they allowed you to set an example for monkey house residents and you lived in an off-base gin mill... And you never forgot the men who accepted you as their shipmate.

Most books about submarines are written by gentlemen who wore gold Dolphins or guys like Clancy who became an expert by mystic inoculation and never saw his name on a qual card.

But there is a book... A book written by a real raghat who wore cloth Dolphins and a combat pin... A fellow who knows what little lethal packages called Japanese depth charges sound like. His name is Ron Smith... His book, *Torpedoman*. If you haven't read it, you should... If for no other reason than former torpedoman Ron Smith is in dire need of clean socks... And he was one of our silver Dolphin representatives in what Tom Brokaw calls 'The Greatest Generation'.

I can relate a personal fringe benefit of reading Ron's literary masterpiece. When your bouncing bride puts it down, looks at you and asks,

"What is strip poker?"

If you play your 'cards' right, you are in for a very interesting evening. You won't find anything like that in other books written on the topic.

Silver Dolphins... We got the complete lifetime package. Not the Ginsu knife lifetime 'Where-will-they-be-when-I'm-eighty?' warranty. No expiration date... No 'Use by...' instructions or 'Mail in by...' warning. Just a complete lifetime knowing guys who forgive your sins and accept you, warts and all.

Dolphins... The damndest common denominator ever made.

The Barrel by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Diesel boats had a conning tower, a compartment above the rest of the compartments contained in linear configuration in the main pressure hull. It was called 'The Barrel'.

The barrel was the size of a VW bus and was packed with gear. The radar console... Dead reckoning tracer (DRT)... The torpedo data computer (TDC)... Engine order annunciators... Gyro repeater... The helm, the main scope, attack scope, torpedo firing panel and a whole truckload of communication gear... With conduit, lines and wiring up the kazoo.

It had an upper and lower hatch. The lower hatch led to the control room. The upper hatch led to the bridge and sail door.

In the winter, the upper hatch became a cold weather wind tunnel. If all the watertight doors were 'on the latch' and you had engines on the line, the engines sucked induction air through the hatch and through the boat every time someone opened the conn hatch. In less than a minute you could turn four compartments into frozen food lockers... And you could blast freeze the helmsman. I stood helm watches where I could actually feel ice cubes passing through my arteries. At the end of the watch one night, I peed a three foot icecicle and left a snowball in the head. All North Atlantic helmsmen know what Butterball turkeys feel like.

On nights like that, Quartermasters and Radarmen huddled around the radar console. The console radiated heat like a fat girls' fanny on a cold night. I used to stand forward on the helm and secretly hope they were microwaving their crotch gear.

Being a helmsman could be rough. Imagine this... The auto dealer sells you a big car with the steering wheel mounted in the trunk. You crawl in there, close the lid and drive from Philadelphia to Chicago with your wife sitting in a lawn chair on the car's roof giving you steering instructions over a cell phone... And gives you instructions to relay to a dwarf under your dashboard, who's working the gas pedal.

I can remember nights when we were coming into Pier 22.

"Five degrees right rudder"

"Five degrees right, aye"

"Two thirds speed"

"Two thirds aye"

"Answering two thirds"

"Meet her"

"Meet her aye"

"All back one third"

"Answering all back one third"

"All stop"

"Answering all stop"

"Five degrees right rudder"

"Five degrees right aye"

"All ahead one third"

"Answering ahead one third"

"Shift your rudder... All stop"

"Shifting rudder... Answering all stop"

"Rudder amidships"

"Rudder amidships"

All that in two minutes.

On firing runs, the barrel got real crowded. It seemed like everybody and his brother was crammed into the place. It was very entertaining to watch officers and Quartermasters stepping on each others toes, and yelling, "Gahdammit quit dunking the scope!", to the poor bastards on the planes.

Being a planesman fighting surface turbulence on a torpedo firing run is no picnic either. You get yelled at a lot. If you've ever sat on a hard locker spending an hour looking at a stupid guage the diameter of an oil drum head... Watching an eight-inch needle and trying to keep 311 ft of obstinate pig iron within one foot of your ordered depth... Then you've had a preview of what kind of activity takes place in the basement of Hell.

But there were lazy nights in the barrel... Night steaming on a balmy summer night. The O.D. didn't give a damn if the helmsman gave him a snake wake, just as long as you didn't run the damn thing off the edge of the earth. Running the old gal three and three... Drinking hot coffee and bullshitting with the Quartermaster and the Radarman. Sure, it got better than that, but those times involved beer and something with painted toenails.

Telling Jokes 412 Feet Down by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Jokes... Nobody enjoys off-color stories like American blue jackets.

We are a bardic people... We tell stories. 'No-shitters' make up the oral tradition of our Navy. A navy bluejacket can turn trivial incidents into epic tales by beefing up the recounting of the tale with a dose of the most amazing bullshit ever fabricated by man.

One of the best ways to pass time in an iron cylinder plowing saltwater with a few hundred feet of ocean between it and fresh air, is telling jokes.

Dirty jokes travel faster than electrical impulses... Years ago, they were spread coast to coast by late night telephone operators and train crews... You could tell one about some guy 'getting in the farmer's daughter's pants' in San Diego and hear the same story in Bangor, Maine two days later. That's America... The land of the three-minute smile.

It was also boat service. Always started with something like,

"Hey Dex... Did you hear the one about the girl and the drunk coal miner?"

And it triggered a string of follow-on...

"That reminds me about the one about the girl and the postman..."

"The girl and the salesman..."

That could last for an hour or so.

If you think back, you will remember nights where you parked your hippockets in the crews mess... Drank two or three cups of that magic, bottom of the pot coffee and laughed half the night. The more absurd the joke, the funnier it was. A boat without laughter isn't a boat... It's a can full of zombies.

I may be wrong, but I get the distinct feeling that in the new order of sensitive sailing with mixed gender close proximity living, if a torpedo pusher came aft, drew a mocha latte al la almond doo-dah with Jasmine scent surprise and said,

"Excuse me girls, any of you bastards hear the one about the blind nympho and the circus monkeys?"

He would have to undergo mental rehab for ten weeks.

Hell, in the old days guys would have busted their mates out of the rack with,

"Hey Dex... They're telling jokes in the messdeck."

And you would crawl out of your rack.. Dust off a couple of well worn raunchies and haul forward to see that Hogans Alley was properly represented.

One time on Requin, the exec scheduled an 'all hands not on watch' practical factors lecture on the care and use of the 45 pistol. We all collected in the after battery fully expecting one of those bullshit long-winded discourses that were like watching paint dry.

The Chief of the Boat came in... Held up a 45 pistol, and said,

"Any one of your idiots ever seen one of these? It's a 45 pistol... Holds eight rounds... Clip goes in here... Pull the slide back... Depress slide release... This chambers the first round. This is the safety. If the safety is off... Squeeze trigger... Very loud noise... Round comes out here, heads in the direction that this tube is pointed and travels in that direction until the progress of the projectile is interrupted by some object, in which it leaves one giant hole in."

"Any frigging questions?"

"Good. This ends the lecture on the care and use of your 45 side arm."

"Anyone heard any good jokes?"

By the time the exec came aft to see how the practical factors lecture was going, we were laughing at one about some guy so drunk that making love was like poking a raw oyster in a parking meter. The COB explained that any kid who had ever stood a late night topside watch and had taken apart his 45 and put it back together so many times, he could do it in his sleep. There was a point where a 12 to 4 topside watch could actually hear his armpit hair grow...

Monkeying with a 45 was an educational thing... Unless you dropped a spring or a small part into the superstructure and had to explain to the duty officer what you were doing below the walking deck on your hands and knees poking around with a flashlight and had a foulweather jacket pocket full of loose pistol parts.

To today's bluejackets, old pigboat sailors must look very unprofessional. But we really weren't, not at all. We were great at what we did. We didn't have interchangeable crews. We were it... Our hull numbers were the only address we had. Riding submarines was our full time job. We knew our boats... We knew our jobs... We had so damn much pride and morale, we could have sold the excess in Army Navy surplus stores.

We laughed... We kept wornout boats operational and going to sea regularly. We had a 'mission ready' record second to none and we laughed at hardship and lived a life on par with sewer diggers... Happy sewer diggers.

Look at the way boatsailors pass jokes on the Internet. I hope the service I loved never loses the ability to laugh. I hope that humor is always interwoven in the fabric upon which Dophins are pinned. I hope that there are still unshaven lads in tattered dungaree

shirts that still ride deep-diving iron, who come into their messdeck, draw a cup of coffee and say...

"Hey... Anyone heard the one about the old boatsailor and the admiral's widow?" .

Answering Bells on the Battery by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Running submerged, the control room, engine rooms (when you were on the snorkel) and the maneuvering room were the only compartments 'open for business'. Those not on watch played Hearts or Acey Duecy, watched movies, drank endless cups of coffee and told bullshit stories, or argued about anything under the sun.

Aimless, stupid arguments passed time... Submarine sailors can spend hours arguing about stuff nobody in their right mind would give a damn about. We spent half the night trying to remember the words to radio ad jingles... Totally stupid stuff... Very important at the time. Being on subs, you miss a lot of what's going on in the real world... Memory is very important.

"Hey Dex..."

"Jeezus, I was dead asleep. What'n the hell do you want? It better be life or death, you idiot. Watcha' need?"

"What was the name of Hopalong Cassidy's horse?"

"Hoppy's horse? Topper... Did you jack me out of a deep sleep for that?"

"Yeah, you can go back to sleep now..."

"You're an idiot... A stark-raving idiot."

"You wouldn't happen to know the name of Gene's horse, would you?"

"Autry? Champion... What is it, gahdam cowboy horse night in the crew's mess? Are you stupid bastards inventorying cowboy horses?"

"Yeah... After chow, we got into Rita Hayworth films but that played out pretty quick. Then we got into cowboy horses."

"Get outta here..."

"Topper... You sure?"

"I'm sure... I saw every damn Hoppy movie ever made. Now, get the hell outta here."

A couple of nights later, I'd be rooting out some poor sonuvabitch trying to get the name of some jerk who played with the New York Giants and dropped a perfectly thrown Y. A. Tittle pass in a game against the Bears.

We were all idiots.

There are times now when I would give anything to have someone to drink lousy coffee with and bullshit with about stupid stuff at midnight.

You got an education on diesel boats that you couldn't have gotten in any university in the country. One night, we spent the better part of two hours discussing various nipple types.

There were nights when we had ten to fifteen guys sitting around drinking coffee, waiting for the first tray of whatever the night baker was turning out to come out of the oven in the galley, and trying to figure out if anyone would believe Him if Jesus showed up in south Alabama.

I used to hate discussions about the stuff you could do by jury-rigging equipment on the boat.

"Dex... The boat has been trimmed to perfect neutral buoyancy. You raise all the masts... Both scopes... BLR mast... Snorkel... Will the change in displacement make the boat surface?"

"Who gives a shit?"

"You wear Dolphins... You should care."

"Give me one good reason, horsefly."

Anyone remember that stupid question where you had 5,000 pigeons in the forward torpedo room and how would it affect the trim if all the pigeons left the deck at the same time and started flying around the room? The answer had something to do with 'opposite and equal reaction'... To me, it was total bullshit. I never got past the mental image of 5,000 birds in the forward room and the reaction of the Chief of the Boat when he stepped through the watertight door into 5,000 piles of bird crap between him and the tubes.

"I'm not interested... The skipper pinned special 'I don't give a shit about pigeons' Dolphins on me."

I flunked Algebra II twice... Hated complicated math problems. We actually had idiots who worked out foot-long equations for laughs. I got 'A's in History. I would sit up all night discussing the Mexican War.

Nobody would believe me, but I served with men who engaged in more intellectually stimulating conversation than any other group I have ever associated with... I don't know how the Navy chose us, but they packed the old smokeboats with some very interesting folks.

"Hey, Dex..."

"Watcha want? You got any idea what time it is?"

"What do you care? We're running at 300 feet with no turn-to in the morning..."

"Watcha want?"

"Who played Miss Brooks?"

"Eve Arden... You bust me out of another wet dream and I'm gonna kill you... Cut you into small chunks and shoot your stupid ass out the GDU."

"Nighty-night, sweetheart."

It kept us sane in a world where night and day was controlled by electrical switches and all we had was each other. Memory can be a most wonderful thing.

Ray 'Olgoat' Stone by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The After Battery Rat would like to make a long overdue statement.

If there had not been a Ray Stone, there would never have been a romp through the 'Rat Memories' and the deluge of horse manure that has saturated the foregoing.

It was Ray's idea. He asked for it and has supported it. I don't think he ever expected the extent of the wagon load he has gotten, but he has formatted it and has been the publisher of it.

He created 'Stone's Scurvy Skivvy Sack'. It was his idea... Alone he set out to create the cyberspace equivalent of a table in a boatsailor's bar. He has never filtered out the bullshit or filed down the horns on anything I have sent him. Ray and lovely Sherri have taken the raw product and served it up with hair, horns and tail... They didn't tie pink ribbons on any of it.

The Skivvy Sack is the repository of the enlisted history of the post-war smoke boat sub force. It is a history that appears in no other forum. I encourage each of you to send Ray your stories. Without them, history will assign our era a blank space in the history of the force we loved... We will be a wasteland between World War II and the Rickover sub force.

Even if we only spin our yarns for each other, they will have found a voice.

I will always be grateful to all of you and your kind encouragement and I would like to acknowledge the debt I owe to Ray Stone, the incubator for what is becoming the worlds largest bullshit motherload.

He Was Our 'Mr. Roberts' by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Every boat should have come with a Noel K. Schilling. He was our father confessor, voice in the wardroom, mentor and when warranted, collective ass-kicker. We loved him. He commanded respect because every raghat knew if he cut himself shaving he would bleed saltwater laced with diesel fuel.

He came from the ranks. The man had once worn thirteen button blues and had butt buffed barstools from Hell to Hong Kong. There wasn't any thought in a bluejackets head he couldn't read like a book. He knew every damn inch of the boat. God never made an Engineman who could hide a bottle of whiskey Schilling couldn't have found if he went looking for it... But he never did. Why? Because he was a submariner and he knew that that was what Enginemen do. That was what made Noel K. a boatsailors' officer. He was the kind of officer, who when he stood OD and a bunch of rollicking blind drunks returned to the boat playing leap frog across the brow would not make you stand topside for one of those stupid 'Gentlemen, just look at yourselves' lectures. He would just turn to the topside watch; shake his head and say,

"Don't let any of the dumb bastards bounce off the tank tops," and go below. That was Noel K.

At morning quarters when someone was giving you a rah-rah speech, the crew looked at Mr. Schilling to see if he had that, 'this clown is blowing smoke up your ass' look in his eyes. He could sort through the bullshit and find a gold nugget in a heartbeat.

Nobody lied to Shilling because it wasn't necessary. That is the mark of a fine officer. You don't tapdance with the king.

Schilling always got tagged with the first night in, duty and battery charge... Just Noel K. and the single guys in crew. Scuttlebutt had it that he got dumped on because he didn't have an Annapolis ring. Hell, what did we know? We just wondered why it was always Noel K. He wasn't a whiner. He was an 'Aye, aye... Let's get the job done and get the hell out of here' officer. The best.

And, he was one good-looking sonuvabitch. Hell, if I had had Schilling's looks and John D. Rockefeller's piggy bank I would have had different lingerie draped over my bedpost every night. He didn't have that goofy goddam Don Winslow of the Navy, Annapolis recruiting poster look...he had that "mothers lock up your daughters" kind of good looks...tough, tan and bark at the moon good looks.

But best of all, you trusted him to figure out stuff.

Enlisted men always have a guy that they look to when things are going to hell in a handbasket. On Requin, when Chicken-Lickin told you the gahdam sky was falling you instinctively said,

"Where in the hell, is Noel K.? Gahdammit, somebody find the sonubabitch or we're gonna die!"

We all had'em, diving officers who could turn a perfectly good trim into a trip to Disneyland. One minute you could build a playing card pyramid on the control room chart table and next minute you were riding a maniac horror show, roller coaster from Hell. Mister Fruit-loops had the dive.

"Sir, Mr. Schilling could most likely figure this out."

"Just pay attention to your depth."

"Aye sir."

Mr. Schilling, like the cavalry, always showed up in the nick of time... Five seconds before bow buoyancy passed the screw guards... His arrival would come as a result of the old man saying,

"Noel go up and relieve Mr. So-and-so and see if you can put the gahdam genie back in the magic lamp."

Schilling would step into the control room... Take the dive and do his master 'trim tickle' and the quartermaster could go back to building toothpick towers on the chart table. The man was a frigging trim magician.

The enlisted men on Requin learned one thing early... Never bet on anything with Mister Schilling... It was the equivalent of throwing your wallet over the side. We all knew that if Mister Schilling wanted to bet you that the sun would not come up tomorrow, he had inside dope on the end of the world during the 12 to 4. Betting with Mister Schilling could be a painful experience. If you had some uncontrollable urge to wager with the wiley rascal, you'd better have your ass spot-welded to your spinal column because Noel K. would have it in his side locker along with everybody else's. I was racked out in my bunk one night and Stukey said,

"Dex you think God is giving Noel K. the straight skinny on everything?"

"Nah...I don't think God and Noel K. have had a conversation in a long time."

"'Never bet with Schilling' should have been tattooed on the eyelids of every E-3 on the boat.

He was Navy. Whatever else the man has done in life could never surpass his competency in submarines.

I remember having the topside watch one summer night and Mr. Schilling came topside and B.S.d with me and the topside watch on the Redfin then went below. The kid on Redfin said,

"That man sounds like a good officer."

"They don't come any finer... Word has it, he wrote the wave tit spec, but don't quote me on it."

Did you ever see the movie Mr. Roberts? Well if you stood Mr. Roberts up against Mr. Schilling he would be small bore. I can't visualize Mr. Roberts grabbing a Bengal tiger by the tail and flipping him inside out. Schilling used to flip five or six inside out before morning chow just to take bets from dumbass bluejackets.

I would like to leave you with this memory of the man.

The morning after a first night in battery charge, the off-going duty section got open gangway liberty at 0900. We waited around about thirty minutes then made our way up to Bells... For the 'breakfast of champions'... Beer, Slim Jims and a lap full of barmaid... A little juke box honky tonk and a shoe shine. Sometime after the animals settled in, Noel K. would show up... Toss his hat on the bar... Loosen his tie and roll up his sleeves... Shoot one game of dime-a-ball pool and shove off.

At Annapolis, this would be called crossing the line fraternization. That is pure maximum load bullshit. What it was, was reciprocal respect. The 'King of the Jungl' dipping into his personal time to visit his animals in their home habitat to show a form of courtesy and respect known only to boat sailors. He didn't get sloppy drunk... He didn't try to be 'one of the boys'. He never did that. He tossed down a couple of beers... Shot a game of pool, colleted his hat... Told us he would leave the porch light on so we could find our steel hull home, and left. He visited the idiot's treehouse as a way of letting us know that he gave a damn about his men... He cared. It was that, that made us love the bastard.

If Noel K. ever needed a kidney transplant there would have been an after battery rat free-for-all to determine what idiot got to be first in line. Or some jerk would have taken out his electricians knife... Cut a kidney out, tossed it on a mess table and said,

"One of you sonuvabitches haul the damn thing forward and give it to Mr. Schilling."

He may have never cheered at an Army-Navy game but he tore up the oceans of the world and earned both silver and gold Dolphins and the reverence of the men he led. The man could have made a gahdam fortune selling leadership in ten-ton loads to the

U.S. Naval Academy. I know, I hauled a load off in my seabag when I shoved off...and I wasn't alone.

Whenever the old coots who rode Requin with Noel K. get together, we sit up half the night telling Schilling stories...some not fit for Sunday school but all part of his legend.

Submarines and Schilling made great sea stories. He was the damndest diving officer I ever saw... The old 'master trim tickler'.

Requin deck force humor, vintage 1960:

Mr. Schilling goes into a fancy cocktail lounge in London... Knockout brunette slips over to his table. Noel K. gets up extends his hand, smiles and says,

"Schilling..."

And she replies,

"No love, it'll cost you a lot more to get into MY knickers then that!"

Always good for an all around hoot.

Salvation Army Ladies by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

God bless the Salvation Army. I'm not overly religious, but I can recognize good Christians. No, not the 'glow-in-the-dark', born again, pain-in-the-ass zealots who aggravate the hell out of you trying to sell you their roadmap to salvation. I personally find them the most narrow-minded, myopic sonuvabitches on earth.

Having said that, no one reveres and respects the Salvation Army more than I do. The ladies who do their work are my angels. In my day, all bluejackets shared that opinion.

It didn't matter how skuzzy the beer joint or gin mill was that you were swilling suds in... They found it... Entered it and circulated silently holding out their tambourine at each table. Men with little money gave generously. Why? We loved them... That was it. We loved the lovely creatures and we knew they did God's work like God intended for it to be done.

When a Salvation Army lady entered a bluejacket dive, the language changed immediately. One minute, words that could blister paint and make a nun puncture her eardrums... The next minute, you could have held a Sunday school picnic in the place. Total, absolutely freely given respect. You can't bullshit a sailor... He knows when he is in the presence of goodness. He knows to give the respect deserved by people who have earned it. Salvation Army ladies have an unmatched record of taking care of sailors and their loved ones.

We called them 'basket hats'. They wore these black straw hats with a maroon ribbon that read 'The Salvation Army' on it. They wore black dresses and black granny shoes... You could put a Salvation Army lady in a potato sack and she would still be one of the most beautiful things in life. There is something to the term 'inner beauty'... I can't define it but I sure as hell know it when I see it.

We never felt that way about the Red Cross. The Red Cross was a phony outfit... We felt that way for a number of reasons. First, it was a social club for officer's wives, who didn't give a damn about sailors but just liked dressing up in 'gray lady' uniforms and having big lunches at the officer's club... And spending a lot of time telling each other about their humanitarian good works. They were the kind of folks who would put on rubber gloves before shaking hands with a messcook.

There is an old, worn-out story about the Red Cross selling doughnuts in World War I. I don't know whether it's true or bullshit... I missed World War I, unless you consider me a participating sperm... The old man was there.

But I do have my own Red Cross story. In 1961, I got an appendix attack... Was helo lifted to Norfolk and wound up over in Portsmouth, Virginia in Norfolk Naval Hospital. All I had was my uniform... a set of dungarees, when I arrived. After they cut me open and jerked out my appendix, I ended up in a rack in an open-bay ward.

The first day, this Red Cross lady turned up, pushing a cart with magazines, writing paper, toilet gear, and decks of playing cards.

"You must be new."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Have you notified your parents?"

It was none of her gahdam business...

"No ma'am... I'm twenty-something years old... I quit checking in with my old man years ago. Last thing he needs to know is that the family black sheep is laid up."

"Do you want anything here?" She pointed to all the stuff on the cart.

"I'll take a deck of playing cards."

"You'll have to give me a fifty cent deposit. You'll get it back when you turn the cards into the shift nurse when you are discharged and return to your duty station."

"I don't have fifty cents."

"I'm sorry... That's the policy. Some sailors have failed to return them."

I didn't get the cards, magazines or anything else off that hell wagon because I couldn't pony up the required four-bits.

I never saw any Red Cross lady do anything worthwhile for a bluejacket. I'm sure they have, but I never heard of it. I give them blood... They tell me that to get it, I don't have to put down a half-buck deposit... Doesn't matter... I wouldn't give the bastards a dime.

The Salvation Army and Navy Relief take care of bluejackets.

At Thanksgiving, you will find the 'basket hats' feeding bums... At Christmas, distributing toys to kids who wouldn't get any otherwise... And all year long, relieving pain, suffering and giving hope to the less fortunate... And going out on lousy nights to circulate among the lowest of the fleet and touching them with the gift of goodness, decency and their example of what Christian charity is in its purist form.

God bless the Salvation Army for what they will always mean to the men who ride this nation's armed ships.

"God bless you, sailor..."

"God bless you, ma'am."

Capt. John J. Vandale, USNR (ret)

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

This is written as a tribute to a gentleman who was beyond a doubt the greatest influence on my life. A lifelong friend, a father I wished I had had and a man who had faith in me when nobody else did (for very understandable reasons).

He was six foot four or five, a Texan. 100% Texan and tougher than a sack full of wildcats. Not superficial tough... Tough... Real tough.

In his heyday, John Vandale could have punched his way out of a gahdam bank vault. He had fists like Fairbanks piston heads. We used to rough house with him, as stupid teenage idiots. It was a good time if you liked to go around with weird lumps on your head. We used to gang up on him when he wasn't paying any attention to us. We made elaborate plans... Tactical wonders... Highly thought out and executed... Always with the same result. He cleaned our clocks and damn near killed us.

The man had a grip like a blacksmith's vise... It was like shaking hands with King Kong. I shook hands with him once and the monster bent my high school ring. John Vandale could have squeezed juice out of a pool ball. I'm prone to exaggeration but this sonuvabitch was for real.

The man ate steaks the size of tractor tires and drank sour mash Bourbon out of glasses that could have doubled for coal buckets. He was what John Wayne wanted to be on a good day.

John Vandale was the complete package and the United States never turned out a finer naval officer. He was old hard-nose navy. An old 'thirty knots and no smoke' sailor whose motto was,

"Throw the donkey in the wagon mamma, we're about to haul ass."

When he was a four-striper, he commanded Desron 34 and the lads made him a flag that had a donkey sitting in a wagon. When they two-blocked that rascal to the truck, everyone knew it meant flank speed. He was the tin can king.

When I enlisted, I was as green as they come. Lanky, big-eared idiot of seventeen, far from a prize package. John's first reaction to my service selection was "God help the Navy."

I was processed in at the Washington Navy Yard. At the time, joining the Navy was not a way to get college education money and Navy recruiters weren't standing in line to kiss your butt. The line was,

"Son, if you are smart enough and convince us that you are good enough, we'll take you."

Stupid sonuvabitches went Army or Marines. I never knew anyone who went Air Force. I just knew they dressed like Greyhound bus drivers and flew stuff that moved a helluva lot faster than I could think.

So there I was... One hundred fifty-five pounds soaking wet with a brick in both hands... Dopey looking kid with ears that stuck out like a cab with both doors open. And, they took me. They may have had 'Buyer's regret' but I never did.

They tested me... Poked me... Peeped in orifices I didn't know I had... Vampire tapped me... Made me hop on one foot... Turn my head and cough, and swear I wasn't related to anyone who had advocated the overthrow of the United States government. I told them I was a direct descendent of a man who did his damndest from 1861 to 1865 to keep the house burning, chicken stealing United States Government up North and out of the South. They said that didn't count... I told them I wouldn't know a gahdam communist if one fell out of a tree and landed on my head. They said that was good enough and that at some hour of the night, I would be sworn in and did I have any questions...

"Yeah, when do I get a sailor suit?"

They shook their heads.

High school girls went for blue-jackets... Having a genuine sailor suit was the primary reason any immature stupid idiot joined the Navy... I was certainly no exception. Once you owned a United States Navy genuine set of dress canvas, you owned the keys to the bloomer locker. The Navy would have gotten a lot more idiots like me if they had put out a poster showing a grinning E-3 up to his neck in discarded lingerie.

At some hour when there was nobody up but burglars and bad women, they called my name. I came into a room and there was (at the time) Cdr. Vandale... Dress uniform, half acre of service ribbons and a very serious look. He looked like the preacher at a shotgun wedding. He told me to hold up my right hand and promise to hence forth and for all time obey The President, The Navy, Congress, The Supreme Court...and all the cats, rats and dogs in North America. He ended with,

"You can put your hand down now, and give me a salute."

And I did. Then he looked at some smiling barnacle-encrusted Chief, lit up one of his high dollar foot long cigars and said,

"The lad's all yours."

He said it like... Well, he's roped and branded and you can toss him in with the herd.

I had no idea what lay ahead and how my life would be changed. Today The Navy has a slogan... 'Let the adventure begin.' It did... It was more like a romp with a great bunch of guys. We were undersea warriors who owned the sea and had the world by the tail... Capt. John J. Vandale gave me that.

When I left the Navy and was at the University of South Carolina, I got a call extending an invitation to attend the captain's change of command when he assumed command of Desron 34.

I came aboard. It was a weird world. I was in civvies because that's what I was... A twenty-four year old college freshman civilian.

Tin can sailors are totally squared away... No frayed raghats... No dirty messcook aprons... No dolphins. I always get lost on surface craft. The only way to get lost on a smokeboat would be to crawl out the 'garbage gun' and take a left at the screw guards.

They had the Change of Command. The outgoing Commander was one long-winded sonuvabitch. According to him every bastard in the squadron could change water into wine, raise the dead and walk on water. I got the distinct impression that someone was going to have to shoot the sonuvabitch to shut him up.

Capt. Vandale walked to the microphone... Slipped on his reading glasses, acknowledged the previous CO's fine words... Said,

"Cox'un, break my pennant."

His pennant was run up and broke free. Then he took off his glasses, tucked them away and said,

"With the captains' concurrence how bout three section liberty."

The animals went nuts.

In the confusion, I went below and found the messdeck... And drew a cup of coffee. I was sitting there, touching my wonderful memories... Sifting through the mental images... Listening to the inane blue-jacket bullshit. I was 18 again running at flank on four and pissing against the tide. I was home. I was where I belonged. I was with my own. Then some clown in starched whites shows up.

"You Armstrong?"

"That's me."

"Captain Vandale requests your presence in the wardroom."

"Tell Captain Vandale, I'll be along in a minute."

"Aye, I'll pass the word."

And he hauls forward.

I go back to catching a smoke and draining a cup of hot sailors brew.

The First Class pain-in-the-ass mate returns.

"Capt. Vandale wants you to get your worthless butt up to the wardroom if you don't want him to have to come down here and jerk a knot in your spine."

The idiot in whites though that was a bullshit friendly meaningless threat. It wasn't. I crushed out my smoke, tossed my cup in the deep sink and hauled forward.

I entered the wardroom. It was jam packed with ladies in nice tea party dresses... Wall-to-wall polite conversation... Officers in high collar whites... Little finger sandwiches on silver trays... And coffee that wouldn't have passed for baby chick piss on a North Atlantic smokeboat bridge.

I was out of place... A whore in church. Drank a cup of coffee... Ate a bowl of sherbet... Shook Capt. John's hand and went over to the first class and said,

"Enjoy this horsefly... Things are about to get a helluva lot tougher in this rust bucket Fletcher class fish fry... You can bet your thirteen button blues on that. If you were smart, you would make book on it. And, the coffee is gonna get one helluva lot stronger, you can bet your surface craft ass on that."

He learned.

He was one tough sailor. And he WAS that... Six foot five of United States Navy.

I owe him more than a fellow could repay in a lifetime... Two lifetimes. He gave me a place to grow from boy to man. He gave me sunsets at sea... And he gave me saltwater over the bridge... He started me on the road to life.

Only disappointed him once... Never did it again. His approval has been my life compass.

They named the Amarillo Texas Naval Reserve Training Center after him. If they were looking for a sailor's skipper, they got one... And a tough rascal rolled into the bargain.

Capt. John J. Vandale, USNR (ret), the genuine article.

E-3 Summit Meetings by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Remember your non-qual days? Back when the entire submarine force seemed hell bent on convincing you that you might be the dumbest sonuvabitch ever born in North America? In Squadron Six, being a non-qual was a lot like being a whore at a logging camp... You got used and abused, and everyone told you things would get better once you 'learned the ropes.'

But there was one place where the non-qual union held their meetings... Our 'Union Hall'. It was a location that belonged exclusively to the non-quals... Our place... A place where you could go whine, moan, bitch about the old bastards, the lifers... The Chiefs... The qualified sonuvabitches whose soul entertainment in life seemed to be making our lives hell.

Our place was the dumpster area on the pier. We used to congregate there after evening chow. We stood around... Caught a smoke or two and exchanged notes.

"Jeezus... What's it like on your boat? You guys have a bunch of old coots who sit around drinking coffee and talking about old decommissioned boats they used to ride? Brain dead bastards."

"Yeah... We've got 'em. You guys got a lot of married guys?"

"Hell yes... All they want is for you to get qualified so they can hit you up for a stand-by. They drive you nuts, showing you pictures of their kids."

"When you volunteered for the boats, didja think it was gonna be like this?"

"Hell no...thought it was gonna be an adventure." "What? You mean like in the war movies? Up scope... Range... Mark... Angle... Mark... Down scope... Fire one... Fire two... Time to target? 45 seconds... Boom, boom and there goes the Fishhead Maru? Hell Dex, that was 1945... This is 1960."

"You ever see a gahdam recruiting poster showing a smiling bluejacket with a wirebrush and a chipping hammer? A dirty apron? Haulin' shitcans down the pier?"

"Hell no... Always show some First Class Bosun' mate buyin' flowers for some good lookin' virgin in Greece or guys in whites riding a rickshaw in Hong Kong, grinning like idiots."

"Life on these worn out, stinking things has to be the bottom of the tank... Man, I think they sold us a ticket to the bottom of the gahdam tank..."

"You ever see the inside of one of those nukes? Jeezus, those monsters have damn near everything. Hell, damn E-3s get their own racks."

"No shit?"

"No shit, Horsefly... Got little privacy curtains... Got head phones to listen to their multi-channel ships' entertainment system... And a built in reading light."

"You're lying..."

"No shit. The damn things are clean... Smell like the inside of a high school girl's lingerie drawer... Everything is bright and new..."

"That beady eyed shrimp, Rickover gets anything he wants. The bastard must have a movie of Congress at a goat gang bang."

"Did you ever consider going nuke?"

"Nah... Too friggin' stupid. Besides, you don't see guys wearing combat patrol pins riding those big monsters."

"Yeah, but they get their spare parts gift wrapped... They don't have to steal stuff off the tender and canibalize boats heading to the scrap yard to keep going."

"Screw'em... None of 'em ever sunk a damn thing that could shoot back."

"Anyone going to D.C.? Looking for a sharing gas ride this weekend."

"Anyone showin' a decent movie tonight?"

"Cubera's got *Splendor in The Grass*... Natalie Wood."

"Carp's got some shoot 'em up with Kirk Douglas."

"Geedunk truck should be around in thirty minutes."

"Hey Jack... Got a smoke?"

"Jeezus Dan... You quit buyin' smokes and just go to bummin' off everyone?"

"How bout a smoke without the sermon. I notice you don't seem to have a problem draining beer pitchers you never toss in for."

"Screw you."

"Just gimme a smoke... Got a match?"

"Good evening gentlemen."

"Good evening, sir."

"What's going on?"

"Just talking treason... Plotting mutinies... Cussing our senior petty officers and swapping Bible stories."

"Carry on..."

"You know that guy?"

"Naw, must be a nuke."

A year later we were all sitting around in our respective control rooms... Drinking coffee and ragging the non-quals.

"Hey kid... Did you ever get trim and drain signed off? Jeezus, you are one thick sonuvabitch... You'll never make it..."

I had become my own worst nightmare... And I loved riding the old wornout boats. We were all fat, dumb and happy and Hyman couldn't have sold us a nuke... Even if he threw in six nekkit blondes and his pay grade.

Generational Difference by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

We speak of generational differences between the old boats and the new. Each generation... Each crew forges its memories, recollections, loyalty and love of the force based on the sum total of their experiences. It has always been that way... Most likely, always will.

We are linked... Each generation to each preceding and each following generation by the twin fish, silver and gold we wear or once wore over the pride in our hearts. We earned a designation that forever sets us apart... We are U.S. Submariners.

I have my memories... And each of you has yours. Collectively, they are our history... The human history of the boats we rode, the squadrons we served in and the force we represented.

Submarines have evolved into giant technological wonders that roam the ocean depths at a range below the surface that many of us, the older coots, find damn near beyond comprehension.

As I sit here, I wonder what memories a modern day boat sailor will have. Will he hear the gentle slap, slap, slap of signal light shutters in his dreams? Will he remember the sound of chipping hammers and paint scrapers battling ever-present rust? The pride a young kid had in repainting the hull numbers of the boat he loved? Is there a modern day equivalent of the first night in battery charge? Does the crew stay up half the night playing hearts, watching movies, sorting laundry, telling lies and running hot coffee to Enginemen and Electricians?

Do COBs still cuss like creatures formed in the womb of Hell and then take time to come see if you are okay in sickbay?

Do they still want to know if you can stand a little closer to your razor as their way of telling you that you look like shit and need a shave?

Do they still meet the boats with fresh milk, mail sacks and guard mail?

Do barmaids still know your names and what boat you are off of? Does cheap perfume still hang in a pea coat and dress canvas long enough to get you in trouble with your true love? Does your neckerchief still dangle in a bowl of chili, your soup or your beer glass? Do you still own thirteen button blues and a jumper so damn tight it takes two of your mates to pull it on you? Do boat sailors still procure clean white hats from unsuspecting spark-shufflers who live in surface craft radio shacks?

Can you still get great scrambled eggs, bacon and hot toast at 0600 on the rescue vessel for a couple of boxes of fresh doughnuts and a worn out, dog-eared copy of last months Playboy?

What benefit did Hyman and his boys, trade you for hijacking your sunsets... Sunrises, coffee on the bridge... Watching sea birds, passing merchant ships, riding heavy seas in lousy weather and filling your lungs with diesel exhaust?

What has the world economy, inflation and the change in sensitivity done to the commercial affection market? It can't still be two tens and a five and you pay for the room, can it?

What has the force substituted for junior officers taking morning sextant observations to figure out where in the hell you are?

Do guys still hang around the galley like vultures waiting for the night baker to pull a load of whatever you've been smelling for the last hour, out of his magic oven? Is ragging the cooks still the cheapest 'best game in town'? Is a smiling, big mouth messcook still the best thing you've ever seen in the morning?

Can you still calculate how long you've been out by the diameter of the salt stains in the armpits of your last dungaree shirt and whether your socks stick when you throw them at the door of the medical locker?

Do they still produce independent duty Corpsman that can fix anything, cure anything, identify small crotch critters from every exotic location, make tight stitches in a state five sea and clean your clock playing Gin Rummy?

Do skippers still wear steaming hats that look like Noah sent them to the lucky bag? Is green cap brass and a torn visor still a mark of distinction? Do cats still try to cover up deck force foul weather jackets?

Are there still mail buoy watches and goofy Non-Quals roaming around trying to locate the main engine ignition key?

Do topside watches still pee on the screw guards on the 12 to 4? Does the geedunk truck hit the pier around 2200? The Krispie-Crème truck at 0400? The laundry truck at 0800? And the skipper five minutes before morning quarters?

Do boats still maintain illegal slush funds and hold non-reg anchor pools?

Are E-3s still the lads who know everything about every subject ever discussed, except their qual cards?

Do the boys from the forward nest still rob the tender slugs, blind? Can you still hijack anything that will fit in a mailbag?

Do folks in any squadron outside of Norfolk yell "Oh God, no!" when they see a boat come sliding into the slip with a SUBRON SIX pennant flying aft of the sail?

Can you still buy 'Sly Fox' wine? What in the hell does it cost now? Are Beer Nuts, Slim Jims, pickled hard-boiled eggs and pool queue dust in your beer still the 'Breakfast of Champions'?

Do barmaids still let you pin a set of Dolphins on the seat of their panties the night you qualify?

Do you still have to drink for your Dolphins?

Memories... Collect them... Remember... Remember the little things. They will form the composite of your old man's memories. They will connect you with whatever comes after you.

One day, you will be parked in your old easy chair saying...

"These gahdam sailors today have no idea how damn tough we had it. In the old days we had to haul all those neutrons and protons in buckets and pour the damn things into our hydro super nuke-a-lator and polish all those gahdam magic wands... Stack the pixie dust... And rewind the Stairmasters... Jeezus, we sure had it rough."

But most of all, be sure to visit the old folk's home and help old smoke-boat sailors find their gahdam teeth.

Boys in Blue by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Once upon a time many long years ago when the Navy paid E-3s less than a hundred bucks a month and sailors still wore their uniform on leave and hitching rides was the only way a submarine bottom feeder could go from point "A" to point "B". There was a place where you could find hundreds of idiots in dress canvas every Friday night.

It was called Falmouth, Virginia, just across the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg. The proper name was Falmouth but to every bluejacket heading north it was 'foul-mouth'... The junction of route 17 and route 1. Starting at about six in the afternoon to well past midnight it looked like three hundred yards of 'Popeye The Sailor Man'... Idiots and AWOL bags. One A-Bomb could have wiped out most of the Second Fleet.

It was a bizarre sight. Sailors returning from overseas deployments hauling stuff home to mama, their girls or wives and dear old Aunt Tilly, were jackassing some of the damndest stuff ever seen on American highways after dark. One half in the bag tincan sailor stood there one night in 'freeze a penguin weather' next to a four-foot plaster statue of some Catholic saint... Must have been Our Lady of Frostbite... There we were, pea coat collars turned up... Hands in our pockets, white hats inverted to cover our ears... Stamping our feet and hoping for a ride... And there was this saint standing next to an AWOL bag with a 'Heading to Philly' cardboard sign propped up against her.

I remember some clown with a painting of a topless, well-endowed Polynesian girl on black velvet. Nobody was near the stupid bastard because you didn't need an I.Q. better than six to know that no Christian family would pick you up standing next to an artistic representation with bare tits as the focal point of it's message.

Another guy had a giant witch doctor mask. I saw a kid wearing a foul weather jacket over a blue and white striped robe and hospital issue pajamas.

"Hey kid...I know it's none of my gahdam business, but what kind of uniform is that?"

"I'm in Norfolk Naval Hospital... They take your damn clothes and lock 'em up so you can't leave until the bastards turn you loose."

The kid proved that there was a big hole in that bright idea.

Everybody had a cardboard sign...

'Will help pay for gas.'

'Just back, six months in the Med.'

'Mother near death.'

'Need ride to Baltimore.'

'Trying to get to New York on a 72.'

'New dad...boy...8lb. 6 oz.'

'Going to sister's graduation.'

'Heading to DC... Or anywhere near.'

'Trying to get to Colts Game.'

I saw signs with more original bullshit than you could find in any major library in the world. You had to hand it to the U.S. Navy; we could create horse manure at a rate faster than Ringling Brothers and The Canadian Mounties combined.

In the summer all you had to contend with was, heat, dust and mosquitoes... it was winter that was hell.

Fortunately civilian drivers were sympathetic to sailors standing out in the cold. They were kind.

Many of you have warm memories of the kindness and generosity of your fellow citizens. Husbands and wives who had sons or daughters in uniform. Truck drivers who had served and old ladies who needed someone to spell them driving. Families with kids, little boys who wanted to wear your 'sailor hat'. Farmers hauling smelly animals who just wanted someone to talk to... Looking back, I met a lot of good people... Damn fine people.

Met a lot of good sailors too.

One night when I was freezing to death and figured I would walk across the U.S. 1 bridge over to Fredericksburg and get something to eat... Hit the head and warm up long enough for the bluejacket mob to thin out. I walked into a place called 'The Hot Shoppe.'

I hit the head. Got cleaned up... Took off my peacoat, hung it up, took a seat, then ordered a bowl of chili and a cup of coffee. While I was sitting there, a gentleman and his wife sat down at the table next to mine. The place was fairly empty. Then the man got up and came over.

"Pardon me, can't help noticing your Dolphins. Are you presently riding the boats?"

"Yes sir... USS Requin... The 481... Subron Six, Norfolk."

"I rode The USS so-in-so during the war... Would you be so kind to join us?"

I joined them. I was honored... They were so kind. When I sat down, the gentleman asked where I was heading.

"DC sir."

"You're in luck, we are heading to Washington... We'll just have dinner and have you in DC by ten or eleven."

"That would be great sir... Thank you."

"Now son, we're having dinner and we would like you to join us."

"Oh no sir... Couldn't do that... I just ordered some chili."

"I've cancelled that... I think I still outrank you. I am an active duty officer stationed in Washington... Now take this menu and order something substantial."

It is a fine memory. I have returned that favor many times.

I write this to explain to today's bluejacket that there was a time when we wore our uniform and were cordially embraced by a population that went out of it's way to assist

servicemen and honor their service. Volunteer service was accorded honor. We hitchhiked... It was not a forbidden practice. It allowed us to carry the pride we had in our service to the public.

I hope we haven't lost that... There have been a lot of changes in the Submarine Service but I hope the pride in wearing your uniform in public with silver Dolphins over your pocket has not grown outdated. That would be a gahdam crying shame.

Removing Organs from the Living by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There's some kind of law that says that no matter how bad you need a gahdam kidney, you can't go to the nearest old folks home and jerk one out of granny between bingo games. Why? Because it's wrong... That's why. You can't use old people for walking parts lockers. Even messcooks know that... And nobody ever accused a submarine messcook of hauling a heavy load of common sense.

Gil Bohannon, the 'Ali Baba of The Forty Torsk Thieves', was kind enough to send me a video tape of a recent salvage trip to the USS Orion (AS-18). They took lights and a video camera and took an extended tour through what is left of 'Mother Onion'. The old girl is not quite dead... I mean she is still watertight and above water in the James River. She is visited regularly by two legged vultures with pipe wrenches, doo-dad removal shears... Acetylene torches... Dynamite... And portable hammerhead cranes. Gil Bohannon heads up a mob of house calling physicians that could do a complete hysterectomy on the Statue of Liberty in less than twenty minutes. Gil is aided and abetted in this nefarious activity by the master quack of the Torsk Family, none other than Larry Deroin aka 'Torsk Doc'. Far be it from me to disparage Doc's medical credentials but according to highly credible scuttlebutt originating in some Subron Six After Battery, Doc once prescribed a termite enema for Pinocchio.

So Gil mailed me the tape. It is a five to six beer tape with two piss calls for ex-bluejackets over sixty. If you see it, rig yourself for an emotional state five with heavy rolls. I sat back, knocked the cap off of one of those Aussie Fosters vision enhancers and hit the 'Play' button on the VCR.

Gil starts it out with one of those ship photos... Ones that they take from Navy planes... Stamp 'OFFICIAL PHOTO' on the back of and give to a Yeoman to keep in a locked file drawer. Officers got them free but Yeomen charged E-3s, three packs of sea stores smokes or sex with your older sister... Or an aunt below 40... Or a goat that had been trained to use Listerine. Gil got a photo of Orion... Don't ask how he obtained it... Some guys had to wear fishnet stockings and talk like Marlene Dietrich.

The tape was okay, until they started panning the camera around in the internal compartments. There is no light... Only the light provided by hand-held illumination devices. The tape is eerie... Weird... You find yourself saying,

"Gil, what'n the hell is that?"

Then it hits you...

"Holy jumpin'jeezus... That's where the old super attenuated mammy jammer used to be. Some sonuvabitch done stole da mammy jammer! Holy hoppin'sumbitch! Da bastards done unbolted the hydro dynamic multi-doo-dad... Done used a cutting torch on da rassafractor and ripped off the whatchamacallit!"

You keep seeing wires danglin' down where stuff oughtta be. It's like the Boltcutter Bedouins have come through and ripped the old girls' guts out.

I was a stupid kid... I never really fully appreciated what happened to old ships. I wasn't so gahdam dumb that I thought that Father Neptune came down and took'em up to ship heaven, but I always pictured order and a dignified ending for noble and gallant ships. I certainly never thought I would be parked in my den watching an autopsy being performed on something not yet totally dead.

At one point Gil and his 'You asked for it' camera crew enters a darkened compartment and pan the camera around... Wow! Take a look at that! A fifteen to twenty foot gash in the side of the ship. You can not only see daylight through it, you can count 30 to 40 hull plate rivets on the next orphaned sub tender in the nest... And it is obvious that nobody gives a damn. Nobody cares... To the modern command element... The forward thinkers of todays space-age Naval Force... Mother Onion... Old Dear Mother Onion, who could provide tits to seventeen to eighteen deep water seagoing submarines... Mother Onion, the old floating sanctuary for non-rated goof offs... The girl who winked and looked the other way, while diesel boat bluejackets fleeced her Radiomen for clean raghats... To today's brass she's just another mass of rusting steel they will eventually have to deal with if the weekend visiting cannibals don't eat her all up in small chunks.

It was sad... I sat there watching the screen and Gil and Torsk Doc led me on their 'Alice in Wonderland Tour'... The memories came back... The smells came back. When the gut robbers on Mother Onion were frying up chicken, every sonuvabitch on the Pier had his tongue hanging out like three fathoms of red blanket.

You wonder about these modern Navy guys... Do they still love ships? Or do they view their boats as motels with screws? Why is it that I feel as if nobody really gives a flying rat's ass about the old AS-18? What do you have to do to get dignified closure to an honorable career? What is happening now to the Orion is the same as sitting granny on the front porch and letting the squirrels, crows and chipmunks eat what's left of the sweet lady, piece by piece... Eyeball by eyeball.

And the tape went on... And on. And I sat there in the fading light of day damning a system that failed to honor past service... Cussing the paper mache sonuvabitches who failed to see how ignoble such complacency is... Men who piss on tradition. Why? Has it no value anymore?

One of the latest generation of Naval Officers recently explained to me,

"Dex, in warfare there is no place for rank sentimentality... It is strictly business."

Horseshit... It has *a/ways* been a business. That of trading blood and armor piercing steel for freedom. No sentimentality?

I have seen hardened men with faces weather-beaten from years at sea, in service to the Nation of their birth, stand as if they had an I-beam for a spine... Hand raised in reverent salute with a tear in their eye simply to acknowledge a Naval legend like Admiral Arleigh Burke. If that is not sentimentality in its most sublime form, I will introduce you to my monkey nephew.

Our generation loved our ships... We identified with them. In the final analysis, they were what the Navy gave us... The love of ships. We weren't enticed by recruiters standing on top of each other to kiss our ass and promise us big bucks and beaucoup wampum for future education.

No sir, we were seduced by saltwater, the company of fine selflessly patriotic bluejackets and the love of deep water, seagoing ships.

Everything has a lifespan, including ships. As we grew old, so did they. Nothing remains forever young... Youthful loves now have silver hair. The barmaids we once knew and loved bought their last box of sanitary napkins years ago... 55 Chevy's rusted out... Mickey Mantle died and the Naval Force reinvented itself. I hate the term "reinvented". What it means is, "traded away the meaningful for superficial bullshit."

I guess the day will come when they will strip our spiritual gun tubs, yank our gizzards and park our worthless sentimental butts out in the James River Boneyard with the rusting hulks that once comprised the finest Naval Force the world has ever known...The USS Orion (AS-18) served this nation well and deserves a better end than being nibbled to death bolt by bolt. Old girl, this tear is for you.

So, what makes what Gil and Larry are doing different from the horde of scavenging sonuvabitches eating Mother Onion chunk by chunk?

They are helping the Old Girl do what she always did... And did best. They are using their valuable personal time to locate and salvage items needed to keep one of mothers children, the USS Torsk an old Subron Six boat, left to disintegrate in Baltimore, in good presentable shape. Like Orion, Torsk was abandoned to folks whose primary and seemingly singular purpose was to milk the old saltwater shark for tourist bucks until she collapsed and sunk.

If the world was as it should be, barmaids from Hell to Hong Kong should stand in line to hug and kiss the magnificent bastards who call themselves the 'Torsk Bandits'. They do Gods work when he is on TAD.

But then we all know the world is damn near never "as it should be"... We rode the boats.

Wonder What Old Gringo Is Doing by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Did you ever wonder where old deep-water boat sailors go when they turn in their earthly issue and pick up their orders at St. Peter's receiving station?

We've all heard the Marines Hymn...

"When The Army and The Navy takes a look on Heaven's scenes, they will find the streets are guarded by United States Marines."

So we know that we'll have to deal with jarheads on the gates. Can you imagine spending eternity pulling gate duty? And writing a gahdam song telling the world that that was the extent of your eternal ambition? I guess somebody has to do it... I can hear the boot pushers at Parris Island...

"Listen up now... When you die, we make you an MP and detail you to stand watch on the Pearly Gates to see that those naughty submariners don't steal the gahdam streets."

"Oh goody... Tell me Sarge, do I get to wear my uniform?"

"You sure do... And you get to spend forever and ever, shining your shoes and brass."

"Wow!!"

Just another of the many reasons that submariners wouldn't have made 'worth a damn' Marines. The way I understand it, old worn-out submarine sailors get assigned to Hell but they are given liberty in Heaven... The part of Heaven where all the bars are located and cab fare is free. They don't issue them wings and the bastards hock their harps for beer money.

There is a bar up there called 'The Sterling Dolphin'... A real dump. It's on Admiral Burke Boulevard. Beer's a dime a quart and the furniture is made out of railroad ties. The barmaids are all big busted blondes... Farm girls from Kansas... And they hand out their apartment keys to all the qualified men. Old man Holland... You know, the clown who invented the first smokeboat and went around with that goofy walrus looking mustache and silly bowler hat... Holland plays the piano.

And there's an old Juke Box... With four hundred thousand cigarette burns on the top. It only plays Tommy Cox... And Glen Miller... Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman... Margaret Whiting... Peggy Lee and Pattie Paige. The walls are covered with old yellowed

photos of "E" Boats, "R" Boats... "S" Boats and all kinds of Fleet Boats... Old Tenders, ASRs and Admiral Lockwood.

The head is a mess... Four old air expulsion, 'Freckle Maker' heads... And a urinal trough made out of the air flask of a Mark 14 cut in half... And the walls are covered with the names of angels who come with removable bloomers.

The wall behind the bar has soft pine paneling and thousands of silver dolphins have been pounded into the wood and an old 127 year old E-3 keeps them Brasso'd up.

The pickled hard boiled eggs fall out of the back end of the Golden Goose and they only sell 'Beer Nuts' in fifty pound bags... For two bits. The Shore Patrols are blind and the liberty cards have no time limits.

There's only one thing on the menu, the 'Rig for Dive' Cheeseburger... It's cooked in all that stuff that comes draining out of the George Foreman grill. The name of every sub ever built and their hull numbers are carved in the tops of all the table tops...

At the bar there is a stool that belongs exclusively to Tom Parks...it has 'Old Gringo' on it in solid gold letters... And late in the evening you can find Old Gringo perched at the bar, tossing down suds and wrapping his arm around the best looking gal in the place. Beer is free for any boat sailor who wears a combat patrol pin.

Old Gringo has a beer mug made out of a 5-inch shell casing with a hatch dog for a handle. The barmaids keep him supplied with hand-rolled Cuban cigars and reports on who's reporting in and when the bus is leaving for hell.

I don't know if that's the way it is... But that is the way it should be. An old hard-core Diesel Boat Sailor should get something like that.

One thing is for *DAMN* sure...Tom Parks isn't standing a damn Gate watch...

You can take that to the bank, Horsefly.

We Just Call Him Art by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There is a bar in Springfield called *C.J.Nickel's*. Farther south it would be called a roadside honky tonk, but up here in the sophisticated Northern Virginia area, it's an establishment that offers brewed products and provides music at the Omaha Beach decibel level that will knock the fillings out of your gahdam teeth. The place is Ray Stone's alternate home... His sanctuary... A sort of refuge he seeks when Toots puts on war paint and gives him a healthy dose of napalm tongue.

One night when Olgoat and I were putting a few beer glass rings on a table top at C.J.'s and making a cursory inventory of barmaid butt configuration and tit development, Ray introduced me to Arthur Smith.

Ray was leaning over the table, blotting up beer suds with one of his obnoxious ties when this distinguished-looking gentleman walks in and waves a greeting. Ray waves back and says,

"Grab a chair Art and let me buy you a beer."

Art pulled up a chair and Ray signaled one of his waitress harems to bring Art a cold one.

"Dex, Art rode the Skate."

Skate??? Hmmmmm... The rascal looked a little long in the tooth to have been a nuke sailor but what the hell, Hyman was no gahdam spring chicken either... So this guy was a nuke, maybe?

"Dex, this old seadog was a torpedo pusher... Rode the 305 boat."

SS-305?? 305 would *have* to be a smoker... An old rockcrusher.

"When did you ride her Art?"

"Well, made six patrols on her during the War. Missed the last one, though."

Arthur Smith... Torpedoman First... Cloth Dolphins, fully-loaded combat pin... Depth charge-evading, Jap-sinking, Art... A gentleman who none other than Admiral Chester W. Nimitz pinned a silver star on, over his pocket for an incredible days work off a Jap-occupied Island. If you own a copy of Theodore Roscoe's United States Submarine Operations of World War II, turn to page 281. For those without a copy handy, it reads like this:

"The first successful submarine lifeguard mission was performed during the strike on Wake, made October 6-7 by Task Force Fourteen, under Rear Admiral A. E. Montgomery. This strike, a combined aircraft-cruiser bombardment, hit the island with hurricane fury. The enemy had been forwarned however, and a number of American planes were shot down. While the battle was at its height, the submarine assigned to lifeguard duty in the area accomplished several daring rescues. She was SKATE, under the captaincy of veteran Commander E. B. McKinney.

"SKATE's lifeguard patrol did not begin happily. At dawn on October 6, the day of the first strike, she was savagely strafed by an enemy plane. In this action, Lieutenant (jg) W. E. Maxon was seriously wounded. His wounds did not appear fatal however, and SKATE continued her patrol.

"At 0545 on the morning of October 7, Skate sighted several squadrons of American planes which were searching for the target island. Signals were exchanged and the dive bombers were informed as to Wake's direction.

"At 0915, Skate's bridge personnel were watching the furious bombardment. On the search for downed aviators, McKinney moved the submarine on a line about six miles offshore. At 1043, several heavy shells landed in the sea close by and McKinney ordered Skate under. When the submarine again surfaced at 1128, she received the word that three airmen were down.

"McKinney trimmed down and headed Skate shoreward in the direction given. The rescue party - Ensign Francis Kay; William A. Shelton, Gunner's Mate 3; and Arthur G. Smith, Torpedoman's Mate 3 - crouched on SKATE's bow as the submarine moved in. Japs on the beach opened fire and shells began to drop around SKATE, but the aviators were there in the water and the submarine lifeguard swam resolutely to the rescue.

"Lieutenant H. J. Kicker was plucked from a rubber boat. A few minutes later, SKATE was alongside an aviator who was struggling in the water. As the swimmer appeared exhausted, Torpedoman's Mate Smith swam to him with a life ring. The rescued aviator was Ensign M. H. Tyler."

In Clay Blair Jr.'s Silent Victory, Art is not specifically named but simply referred to as 'a three-man rescue party that clung to the bow'... Page 521. Mr. Blair glossed over a very heroic deed performed by a young South Carolinian later personally decorated by the King of Jungle (Pacific).

Art Smith is our friend. More than that, he represents the best of what our Submarine Force was, is, and hopefully ever shall be. To give you some idea of the kind of gentleman we are talking about...

Not too long ago, Ray wangled us tickets to visit the C.S.S. Hunley in Charleston. In a world of wanglers, the Goatman is major league... He wangles like Minnesota Fats shoots pool. Ray says,

"Hey, got us all reservations to go see that bicep-powered contraption that still has the first torpedoman to sink a ship, inside of it."

So, Olgoat, Toots, Solveig, Art, and I wound up in a motel in Charleston. The next day, after a great seafood lunch at *A.W. Shucks*, we returned to the motel to get freshened up for our 4 PM date with the first boat to make a successful torpedo run.

We met in our room. Art was wearing a Rontini Sub Vets hat and his silver star. He said,

"Do you think it would be okay to wear my medal?"

This was like Jesus turning up at McDonalds and asking two jerks flipping burgers if it would be okay if he wore his halo.

"Okay?"

You bet it was okay... More than okay. we were all honored. Seeing that gallant rascal wearing that 'Nimitz-installed recognition' and knowing that somewhere there is a Naval aviator who was given all of his tomorrows by a very courageous TM3, who risked his life to see that this pilot had a future.

When we arrived and our time to view the actual craft in it's holding tank came, we found ourselves in a defined group assigned to a guide who turned out to be a recently retired sub vet. When we assembled on the platform to view the rusted hulk that had once delivered the first ship-sinking torpedo hit, the guide took time to recognize Art's wartime boat service. It was the kind of thing submariners do for submariners... Made me proud.

Art is the kind of fellow who doesn't feel comfortable being the focal point of attention and is not one to embellish his deeds or call attention to his wartime service. It is just not his nature.

Ray and I have found that getting stories out of Art is a lot like extracting teeth from an overactive bobcat... Through his rectum... Ain't easy.

But, in the next week or so, Ray and I plan to sit Art down, oil the rascal up with a liberal application of fermented hop lube and pump his mental bilges for some of his 1941 to 1945 memories... The recollections of a man who served in a torpedo gang that once slapped their last two fish into the largest battleship ever made. A man who loved Japs so much he went out of his way to provide them many, many long distance swimming opportunities. Art Smith is a submariner who knows exactly why a lot of rapidly graying Japanese folks throw flowers in Tokyo Bay on Fathers' Day.

Arthur G. Smith. Fighting submariner, true, honest-to-God American hero... Friend to two damn near totally worthless diesel boat, later generation, bluejackets.

Art Smith... Coming soon to a ratbox near you... Stay tuned.

Once We Rode Smokeboats by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

One of the most gratifying things about writing these goofball recollections has been the e-mail I have received from numerous old 'out to pasture' bastards who have taken the time to say they approve and remember. That's a gift and deeply appreciated.

I hope I have never characterized myself as anything other than a full-of-oats jerk... Because that was all I ever was. An idiot who was damned proud to be accepted by my wonderful shipmates and who was the silly sidekick of the most loyal shipmate a bluejacket ever had... Adrian Stuke. Adrian Stuke would have freely given me anything

he had and he knew he could count on the same from me... Unfortunately, as boatsailors at our level on the social scale, we never had a helluva lot.

We worked hard... No shirker lasted long in small boat service. There was no way to disguise sloth and worthlessness in an 80-man crew. You had to pull your load or you would find yourself in another line of work. I never heard the words 'loafin' bastard' and 'hardcore submariner' used in the same sentence. Stuke and I would have rather had the COB slap us on the shoulder, shake our hands and say... "You worthless sonuvabitches never cease to amaze me... You do good work." than get a medal.

And we did do good work. The only way to earn respect on a diesel boat was to do a good job. Officers used the term... 'Well done.' Damn, those words made a young fellow feel good.

We all took a lot away from our tour in submarine duty than we ever recognized at the time. Honor, respect for damn hard work, patriotism, respect for the deeds of the men who gave us our gallant history... A high standard by which to judge leadership... And a deep appreciation for the highly qualified senior petty officers. Chiefs and senior POs made every diesel boat what it was. I was a raghat at test depth level in the stew pot of ships' company. Cussing Chiefs, and what appeared to me as old bastards at the time, was a way to pass time... It was cheap entertainment. But, we knew that these men were the men providing us the professional knowledge we would need to truly become worthy of calling ourselves submariners.

This is an enlisted chronicle. Most stuff written about submarines is written by officers, technical experts or self-appointed 'never been there' authorities. This is about enlisted men simply because I was a bluejacket and it was all I knew.

None of my seagoing expertise was of such value that I was consulted by commissioned personnel forward. Stuke and I were only invited forward to explain aberrant behavior like being overcome by an inebriated, uncontrollable urge to leapfrog parking meters on Granby Street or explain our participation in some dust up in Bells.

"When are you two bastards going to become 4 OH SAILORS?"

...Was a frequently asked question during our behavioral consultations. We never got into hot water of a depth requiring a 'mast' but we did find ourselves treading water in soup we had to explain.

But, you tend to remember the pranks and monkeyshines. They represent the good times. The acceptable idiotic behavior expected from the young.

In recounting shenanigans, you tend to gloss over the truly meaningful. Things like the feeling a good man has when he simply watches the gentle rise and fall of your national colors aft of your conning tower... The feeling of organizational connection with submarine combat veterans. The thrill you felt when you raised a foreign shore or

passed a large foreign ship on the open sea... The tug you felt at your heartstrings when you rendered shipboard honors to the Sub Force honored dead. There were many such moments. Every American bluejacket, worth a damn, carries such memories in the lucky bag of his heart. It makes us what we are.

The simple mundane and seemingly endless moments spent at our mess tables at sea bonded us into a crew... It was at chow and play in our messdeck that we forged the deep lifelong friendships we all have... The only people who will ever understand us, truly appreciate the life we lived, will always be the men with which we shared coffee and bullshit conversation inside the pressure hulls of aged smokeboats. The names of the unshaven sweatsoaked goodhearted bastards we shared strong coffee with will be forever engraved in our hearts. We and we alone, knew the value of the insignia we had earned. We knew that each man we called 'shipmate' had proven himself as worthy of being 'Qualified in Submarines' by completing a difficult and highly demanding course of instruction. They had mastered the intricate details of both location and operation of all shipboard equipment. Every boatsailor knew he could fall asleep secure in the knowledge that the men on watch could properly react to contend with any situation, evolution or emergency that might arise.

At no other time in my life have I been associated with a team as professionally competent as a diesel boat crew. I say diesel boat crew simply because I freely admit that I don't know the first damn thing about any submersible that post-dated petroleum-powered undersea boats. We were a tight mob... A group of men dedicated to a singular purpose. I hope the men of today have similar feelings. We were taught that 'The ship comes first.' Any bluejacket who adopts that as the guiding principle upon which he bases his Naval service can only become a credit to himself, his shipmates and his ship. The reputation of a ship simply reflects the attitude and professionalism of her officers and men.

If you ever find yourself in the presence of a bluejacket or veteran who denigrates the name of his ship... He was most likely a bum. Ships with bad reputations incubate bums.

I am proud of every boat I rode... I was always taken in by the crews and had the privilege of serving with damn fine men... An experience that was not unique to me.

Not that anyone gives a damn, but given my service experience... If given the opportunity to find myself 18 once again in a recruiting office full of slick talking Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps goat ropers, I would say,

"Which one of you silver-tongued bastards can get me a rack in whatever you clowns call the after battery, today?... And, oh yes... A clean coffee cup?"

I wouldn't trade any of it. Well, maybe the really cold, I mean nut-frosting hours on lookout watch and the freezing rain topside watch, a little less of that wouldn't be missed.

There is a patriotic selflessness in enlisted service. Officers are always, genteel and reserved. They spend so much time setting a proper example (properly so) that they collect proper memories... The raghats had a great bottom-up view of sea service... We met hookers... We butt-buffed barstools in dives, pubs and gin mills where generations of the world's blujackets had tossed down suds and fondled women that would have been run out of your hometown on a rail.

I am sure that we tied up in locations that had sites worth visiting but raghats generally gravitated to places with absolutely no educational value whatsoever, unless you were compiling an international directory of the 'sewer pits of the globe.' To us, it was where boatsailors were expected to go... There was always some qualified man who had been there before and knew where to go... So we followed him to some rat hole where beer was cheap and where you met very interesting women... Some of which could actually read and write... And all of which knew the exact amount 'American' it cost to get beyond her skivvies.

Old boatsailors can name fifty or more foreign beers... Make out the exchange rate of weird foreign currency... Remember barbecued monkey strips, strange fruit and drinking stuff an officer wouldn't use to clean a head with. Old boat sailors can remember passing forbidden bottles of assorted firewater around in a returning motor launch until the last man tossed the empty bottle over the side. They remember the return to quarterdecks of some of the finest ships that that ever plowed saltwater.

All we have now are those memories. I have since visited places we went as young men. We all have found that marriage and domestication has tamed us... And with a gentle bride in tow, it is impossible to visit the locations of enlisted good times.

This is rambling discourse originally intended to thank those of you who have followed this thread of bluejacket memories. Frankly, I am amazed that anyone out there gives a damn... But I really appreciate your kind support. I wish some real writer would capture the life we lived, but I doubt there would be a readership base to support such a publication... That's a bloody shame because there are universities that publish entire books on June bug reproduction and the gahdam political trends in places with populations you could fit in a VW bus. Somebody should be able to ferret out something of literary merit in the last years of the Diesel Submarine Navy. Not officers stuff... It's all officer stuff... No, I would like to read a book about simple *Raghat Jack the Last of the Smokeboat Boys*. His life... His contribution to the history of the United States Submarine Service... A book that validates our existence and records our passing. Is that too much to ask?

And, oh yes, never let us forget that we served in a service where returning to your ship after giving your white hat to a wide-eyed five year old was always understood and forgiven with a smile.

Liberty Launches We All Knew by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Remember anchoring out... 'Swinging the hook'? I have no idea how they decided who laid alongside the pier and who anchored out. I know that when ships came into port, the order of entering had something to do with your skippers rank, date of promotion or shoe size... Something like that. Hell, the old man never explained it to the *After Battery Rats*.

Well, however it was determined, we ended up dropping our hook off our liberty ports a lot. Personally, I preferred it. When you nested alongside the pier you had pier responsibilities... Passing drunks... Curious visiting surface craft and shore duty clowns. Swinging the hook gave you a unique location all your own. You got visited by bumboats... Girls... Skimpy-clad girls and regular visits by touring liberty launches.

There were two ways you could get to and from the beach... Water taxi and liberty launch. Water taxi transport was damned expensive... I only rode them twice. Both times, the only choices I had was one helluva swim, missing movement or forking over an obscene amount of wampum to the *Jesse James Raghat-hauling Water Taxi*... Crooks.

Missing movement in the old days was a damn serious thing. When you finally caught up with your boat, I think they just soaked you with gasoline and lit you off... I don't know because we always made it back to turn up for the morning quarters drunk parade.

If you don't remember good times in liberty launches you're brain dead. The rides in motor launches with great shipmates were some of the most wonderful times in my life. Jumping into a motor launch heading into an exotic port was catnip to a red-blooded American 19-year old lad... At 19, any place beyond 25 miles of your hometown is foreign and exotic.

Returning in a load of happy, rollicking 'three sheets to the wind' bluejackets... Singing songs your mother would have shot you for singing, telling about female companionship you rustled up... And laughing like deranged lunatics... Damn, it was fun.

For anyone reading this who may have no idea what in the hell a '*Liberty Launch*' was or still is... I will attempt to describe it as we knew it. You must remember that today's Navy has for reasons known only to itself, taken a helluva lot that meant a great deal to her sailors and done away with it in the interest of proper decorum. I have difficulty understanding what laughing, singing and acting like a fool while plowing saltwater back and forth between ships and the shore has to do with anything but forming men into crews... Teams of hardworking, fun-loving submarine sailors.

Liberty launches were large motor driven launches (boats) that were carried on the upper 'boat deck' of large surface ships or utilized by Naval shore installations to haul supplies and personnel. They came with a crew of two... A coxswain (pronounced 'cox'un') and a clown called a 'boathook'. When the Navy found that an idiot with the brain of Dorothy's scarecrow had made it through Great Lakes, they made the bastard a 'boathook'.

The cox'un operated the boat, while the 'boathook' acted like a safety patrol on a rowdy school bus. The Navy provided the knuckleheads with an eight foot pole with a brass skull buster on one end... One tap with that little fairy wand and it was lights out for the rest of the ride... I never saw that happen, but there were many nights I deserved it. Giving the boathook a hard time about the professional knowledge required by his naval career choice was great late night entertainment.

Officers had their own peanut gallery aft in what was known as the 'stern sheets'. It kept them separated from the livestock load of unruly blue jackets in the midships well. It was like having a fifty-yard line seat at the world lunatic championships.

Saw some great shows in liberty launches.

One night the boathook yelled at some jaybird,

"Hey kid... Yeah, *YOU* with the inside-out raghat... Deep-six the bottle. Don't give me any crap... Just toss it over the side."

The kid stood up... Took off his neckerchief and did a neat magic trick where he made the jug disappear. Everyone aft of the kid saw him shove it up the back of the jumper of some lad sitting next to him... I was impressed.

When we dropped the kid off at his boat, we saw him pass it to a couple of guys topside who drained the remaining contents and spiral-passed it into the darkness.

Saw a kid stand up and say,

"I forgot to buy something for my mother!"

And promptly hop over the side... And then he started dog paddling in the direction of the lights of Hamilton Bermuda... It took thirty minutes to fish Catfish Man out of the bay and haul his dripping, sopping wet ass back aboard.

The Navy in it's infinite wisdom, created a little blue crescent-shaped patch with your ship's name embroidered on it... It served as the zip code for inert drunks. The shore patrol would haul the terminal revelers down to the fleet landing and sort them by ship and stack them for the last 'boat round'... No officers ever took the last launch... The 'zoo barge'. Boy, was that one helluva ride!

Somewhere in the vicinity of midnight, the sober guys loaded the 'stove wood drunks' and the officer at the landing yelled,

"Cox'un, shove off and make your rounds."

...And the cox'un yelled,

"Aye sir!"

Fired up his engine and headed out to the boats.

And we sang... The Navy sang long ago. We sang old bluejacket songs into the darkness of empty night watching a phosphorescent wake trail off into vacant blackness... In the glow of a stern light.

*"In Guantonamo Bay, Call her Gitmo for short
Not much of a base, Much less of a port
One look at this hole And you know that you're seein
The gahdamdest place In the whole Carribbean.
"So hoorah for old Gitmo On Cuba's fair shore
The land of the cockroach, The flea and the whore
We'll sing of her praises And pray for the day
We get the hell out of Guantanamo Bay."*

It went on...and on...some of you will remember it. We called it, *The Gitmo Song*.

And there was...

*"Charlotte the Harlot The girl I adore
The pride of the prairie, The cowpunchers whore."*

And...

"I can help you pretty wavey If you'd like to leave the Navy, Have a baby on me!"

And...

*"My first trip up the Chippewa River
My first trip to Canadian shore
There I met a Mrs. Miss O'Flannagan
Commonly known as the Winnipeg whore."*

And there were many others; *'She wore red feathers and a hooley-hooley skirt'* was a Brit favorite.

There must be millions of the damn things.

Liberty launches were where we came together... Tossed alcohol-saturated, regurgitated foreign food cookies over gunnels... Hooted... Hollered, pounded each other on the back... Sang stupid songs... Yelled,

"Sit down, you dumb bastard!"

...And formed the lifetime bonds that connect old smokeboat crews.

It all started in those small boats.

Duty Nights With The Animals by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Section Three... Kind of a family within a family. When you stand duty together for as long as we did, you get to know how everyone takes his coffee... Who has five bucks two days before payday and who's raising toe fungus in his seaboots.

Being assigned to Section Three on Requin was a lot like being a mangy, stray mutt at the dog pound that got adopted by the worst family in a rundown trailer park... Taken in by a bunch of guys who owned the most raggedy white hats in the fleet and answered, "Who gives a shit?" to damn near every question ever asked.

After the liberty section doused themselves with ten gallons of *Old Spice* in lieu of proper hygiene, scraped off chin whiskers with 'hand me down' *Gillette Blue Blades* and hauled off hell-bent for flesh and fermentation, the messdeck was like a night with Ma and Pa Kettle down on the farm.

While the duty messcooks scraped what was left of the evening meal into sharpshooter buckets, did the dirty dishes, dried them with rancid towels, stored them and racked the coffee cups, the 'stay-at-homes' sat around reading 3-day old newspapers... Trying to scare up a card game or get a ballgame on the RBO.

It never changed... There was always some poor sonuvabitch over in the corner of the messdeck using an electrician's knife to remove the green fur rim from a slice of baloney you had just hauled to and from Nova Scotia. Unlike fine wine, baloney does not improve with age... It's not good to eat the stuff after six months of shipboard birthdays. Green furry meat products... Potatoes with two-foot roots... Brown, speckled lettuce... Prune hide tomatoes... Cereal with acrobatic mites or a built in weevil population, and doughnuts that could be used as roller skate wheels, were diesel boat delicacies.

The lazy bastards in Requin's Section Three, operated on the premise that 'if a buzzard would eat it', it was still good. Somewhere we got the idea that catsup and Tabasco Sauce not only arrested decomposition but could make the dead live again... At least long enough to be eaten. I have seen grown men eat mayonnaise that could have been mistaken for the contents of a coyote zit.

But what the hell, nobody ever took the messdeck on duty night to be the coffee shop at the Waldorf-Astoria.

"Hey Mike whatcha reading?"

"Some gahdam three day-old edition of the East Jeezus Gazette."

"Any news?"

"Yeah, you will be glad to know World War II is over."

"Who won?"

"Doesn't say."

"Any ball scores?"

"Yeah if you're interested in the East Jeezus Double A Whizbangs...The bastards got their ass handed to them by the Bump-In-The-Tracks Bumble Bees."

"I mean Major League stuff... How 'bout Baltimore?"

"Baltimore? The idiots who read this rag couldn't find Baltimore on a Maryland map."

"What're you reading it for?"

"I'm queer for combine parts auctions and agricultural reports on pea prices."

"Anyone interested in reading Lesbian Lovers?"

"Jeezus... That thing still around? I swapped it for Truck Stop Babe last year on that Bermuda run."

"How 'bout a movie?"

"We've seen em all... Most more than once."

"Maybe we can get the duty officer to work a swap with the Cubera?"

"Maybe so."

"Let's do it... Get Buckner to work a deal and get us a shoot'em up... How' bout it?"

"As long as it isn't some tired-ass, black'n white, 1930's, 'Head'em Off at the Pass' cowboys vs. the sodbusters flick where some idiot kisses his horse."

"So does that mean if it's in color it's okay?"

"Yeah..."

So, you got the duty officer to make the swap... Having an officer to work a swap with another boat had certain advantages. Naval Academy guys trusted each other... You could unload weird movies in an officer-to-officer trade... First, movies were heavy as hell, and it was always a good deal to swap ten for a good movie... This way, the officer that got ten new movies for one and would think he was a master trade negotiator... When, what he had acquired actually was a half-ton of crap to jackass back to the motion picture exchange. Enlisted men understood this because they were the donkeys who did the jackassing.

"What did Jim Buck get?"

"3:10 to Yuma"

"Seen it."

"You're gonna see it again... And if you say anything that gives away the ending, we're gonna crush your skull with the GDU wrench."

"Wanna make popcorn?"

"Yeah... But, don't use the butter down in the Cool Room... Shit, smells funny."

"What kind of funny?"

"Smells like the inside of a dog dish."

"Well melt it... Heat'll kill the germs."

"You stupid bastard, it'll still smell like baby burp."

"OK... Popcorn without baby burp butter."

"Hey Jack... You gonna make popcorn?"

"Section One made popcorn the last time we were in. They left Rat Johnson a pot with a bunch of burnt black stuff in the bottom of it... Stuff he made'em use a paint scraper and steel wool to clean out. If you get that black stuff stuck in the bottom of the pot, go

topside and throw the sonuvabitch over the side and we'll sign a blood oath that we never saw it."

"Dex, anyone ever tell you that you have a criminal mind."

"No... Nobody ever said I had a mind."

"Anyone wanna make a Geedunk Truck run and get some sodas?"

"Yeah... Let's pool our money... We'll put a cereal bowl out to collect money... Go root through your bunk locker drawer for loose change. No holding out. When we get the money, we'll flip to see who goes up to the pier to load the Guard Mail bag with cold soda."

"Don't forget to get one for the Duty Officer and Mr. Schilling."

"Schilling aboard?"

"Yeah... He was checking ordinance logs earlier."

And that scene was repeated many nights.

They were my family... We watched shoot-em-ups... Bare feet propped on spud lockers... Eating popcorn with rancid butter... Drinking root beer and commenting on every pair of tits owned by any actress appearing on the screen... And tossing dirty mess pots over the side.

That's what smokeboat sailors did... We either did that or just sit around cussing Master-at-Arms, used car salesmen, the Orion laundry, Castro, the dumpster watch, Navy dentists, and everybody in France.

Those nights were some of the best of my life... Why?

The ugly bastards I spent them with, were my brothers.

More Lookout Memories by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

You saw some very interesting stuff standing lookout... Whales... Sea turtles... Oil drums... Phone poles... And once a red VW bug. But the clearest memory was finding yourself in the sea lane at night with what we called a trans-Atlantic liner... The equivalent of the modern cruise liner, at night.

The navy had a policy of contacting the bridge of a passenger liner and exchanging pleasantries... Asking if they held us on radar and if they did, telling them we would be darkening ship... Turning off our running lights and 'lying to' so as not to become an

attractive nuisance that would cause passengers to flock to the rail. That was the official word.

Scuttlebutt had it that Rickover didn't want the world to know that America had sailors who looked and smelled like apes at the zoo and old, worn-out rust-stained boats with missing paint and a couple of line locker lids. In any case, we would sit there, darkened ship, watching a seagoing festival of delight go churning by... Like street urchins watching a passing ice cream truck.

"Look at those sonuvabitches... The bastards are up there swimmin' and slow dancin' and it's damn near midnight."

"Yeh, and you can bet yur ass the bastards who drew the eight to twelve won't be going below and finding horsecock and Velveeta cheese midrats. The cook will look up and say, 'Pierre, do you want wine with your lobster?' Not, 'Hey Dex, you want bug juice or panther piss with your vulcanized, damage control patch sandwich?'"

"Ride one of those whomping monsters and you'd never hear the word 'hotsack'... Those lucky bastards probably get staterooms bigger than the Old Man's."

As they passed, you could hear orchestra music drifting across the water. As she slid by, you could see men who were dressed far beyond the level of an E-3 with sub, sea and foreign duty pay... Dancing with good-looking gals in dresses that would have knocked a sizable dent in a carrier's slush fund.

"Hey, Stuke..."

"Yeah, Dex?"

"Gonna ride one of those sonuvabitches someday. Gonna book one of those cabins, where some big-titted honey named Olga comes in every night and scratches your back 'til you fall asleep."

"If you get married, what'chu think your wife is going to say about this triple 'D' cup Olga?"

"Anyone ever tell you that you are one lousy fantasy-torpedoing sonuvabitch?"

"Yeh, yeh, yeh, go on with your bullshit."

"Gonna call up the Chief of the Boat and say, 'Hey Chief, how about having one of your non-rated gofers run me up some two-inch sirloins, couple of lobsters and melted butter, and a bottle of Chateau Jesse James big bucks champagne... And just put it on my tab."

"So Kemosabi, whatcha gonna be using for money, eh?"

"Gonna marry some royal princess, an oil well widow or one of the Kennedys... A family that size has to have some 'ugly as hell' gal somewhere that they are having one helluva time trying to unload."

"Dex, you ever consider actually working for a living?"

"Yeh, once... But I got over it."

"How much do you think a ride on one of them baby's would set you back?" "Hell, an arm and a leg... Those folks hoppin' in and out of those two swimmin' pools aren't folks you'd likely be running into at a Salvation Army thrift store sale... You can bet'chur ass on that."

"Much wampum, eh?"

"Heap big wampum."

So, you hung in there, looking like a bum that lived in a cardboard box, scanning the night horizon through your 7x50s and dreaming what it would be like riding one of those Cinderella glass slipper monsters.

For damn sure, there wouldn't be no hairy-faced below decks watch wacking your ass with a clipboard yelling,

"Dex you sonuvabitch, roll out... You've got fifteen minutes to relieve the watch. C'mon, you worthless bastard... Roll out. HIT THE DECK!"

No sir, there would be a gentle tap on your mahogany stateroom door and Julio would say,

"Mr. Armstrong, breakfast is being served in the grand salon, should you care to partake."

Then you would roll over and gently shake your little blond bed partner...

"Darlin', you wanna go to morning chow?"

"No sweetheart, lets have breakfast in bed."

I never got to do it but that was a great fantasy, standing on a dark bridge with two guys as ugly as you, watching one of those heavy-duty playpens go by.

Watching lights... Running lights, range and masthead lights moving back and forth at night, kept you connected to life on the planet. They told you that there were still human beings out there beyond the pressure hull. Your world might be contained in nine watertight compartments but that wasn't the entire extent of civilization.

Night steaming on station was the best. You arrived 'on station' somewhere late at night... The exercise didn't start until 0800... So you just ran around in the ocean, topping off your batteries and plowing up the ocean just for the hell of it.

The helmsman could bullshit with the radar operator and let the damn boat wander all over hell and half Georgia. You could tell the sonuvabitch was goofing off... You'd hit the arm of the other lookout, point at the wake that looked like a big snake chasing you, and laugh.

Once, we were steaming on station... Night steaming... The young OD set a course to run an outward leg, then at a certain point in time, he would call for a LORAN cut, reverse course and put us on station at the appointed time.

Adrian Stuke and I had been in the shears about thirty minutes when a kid hauled coffee to the bridge and whispered to us,

"Art said to tell you to keep Mr. Whatzizname's attention... He's gonna throw a big loop in the wake."

One of Stuke's many talents was the ability to hold extremely intelligent conversations on stuff he damn near knew nothing about. Some of the subjects under discussion were:

Artificial insemination of crocodiles... The location of Noah's Ark... Mating rituals of aboriginal societies nobody ever heard of... The little-known secrets of interplanetary space travel... How to distill *Lucky Tiger* hair tonic and get something resembling bourbon... How to get beyond a Catholic girl's bloomer elastic.

Stuke was the master.

While my running mate engaged the O.D. in a running discourse, I watched the moon slowly do a 360-degree rotation around the boat... Ten degrees at a time... Then return to our original course. When the O.D. called for a LORAN position report, he said,

"Jeezus, we should have been here... Or somewhere near here at one-third speed. But, we're HERE! Hell, we could row this damn thing back and be on station by 0800. I can't figure it out... No sea state... There's something wrong..."

He never figured it out, but it didn't take the COB two seconds to figure out the mystery.

He paid us a little visit when we had been relieved and were standing around in the crew's mess laughing and stuffing our goofy faces with midrats.

"You idiot jaybirds think you are real cute. You bastards pull that stunt one more time and I will kick your butts so hard, you'll have to unbutton your shirt collars to go to the head. Never, I repeat, NEVER monkey with an ordered course! They hang bastards who

pull that kind of crap. I MEAN IT! This is straight gauge, no bullshit talk! Now go hit the rack and pray that green kid doesn't figure out what you stupid bastards pulled off tonight. JEEZUS! You guys make regular idiots look like Nobel Peace Prize winners!"

"Chief, how did you figure it out?"

"Because anyone with the intelligence of a frigging oyster could see it plain as day... And knowing the idiots involved, it didn't take two seconds."

Night steaming. Killing time plowing saltwater and watching for the Fletcher class cans coming to hunt us and dump all sorts of noisy crap all over us. That was about as good as it got.

It never got any better except when the night baker made cinnamon rolls.

The Thrilling Days of Yesteryear by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

At 0530, the obnoxious, loudmouth Below Decks Watch would enter the berthing area in The After Battery... Flip on the light and launch into five minutes of complete idiot behavior.

"Okay ladies, up and out... C'mon you lazy bastards.... Roll out. Hit the deck... Drop your cocks and grab your socks..."

He would whack somebody on the butt with his clipboard and yell,

"Hey you stupid bastards... HIT IT... ROLL OUT! I haven't got all gahdam day, got a lot to do. The old mans aboard... Got orders to pull this pig away from the pier by 0800."

"Jack... You whack me with that clipboard once more and I will shove the damn thing down your gahdam throat... You got that, sweetheart?"

"Oh, get screwed... Rat and the messcooks are putting down first chow... Coffee... Fresh milk... Fresh fruit... Eggs... Bacon... They are going to secure the messdeck in thirty minutes."

"Jack... What's the chance of you serving us breakfast in bed? Be a shipmate... I'll take coffee... Some scrambled eggs... Toast... Butter the toast... And four or five strips of bacon."

"You've gotta be a mental defective... You non-quals get some chow and get your worthless butts back here and stow the gear in this frigging pig sty, for sea."

Helluva way to greet the dawning of a new day. Hell, you could look up the After Battery hatch and still see stars... 0530 is not morning. Morning doesn't start until the gahdam

sun comes up... Everybody but the Submarine Force had figured that out. Anything before God hangs the sun out, is night.

But you hit the deck... Found socks and boots... Wiped the sleep out of your eyes... Sniffed the armpit of your dungaree shirt to see if you can get another day out of it before the crew asks you to take up residence in a pier dumpster. You scrubbed your teeth... Threw some cold water on your face and stumbled forward for coffee and some doughnuts... Or some chow.

After chow you hauled your worthless butt topside.

"Dex... You ready to start getting ready for sea?"

"Bout as ready as I'll ever be, Chief."

"Well, when your running mate Stuke finds his way topside, you two goofy bastards grab a T-wrench and pop open the line locker lid studs... Then crawl the superstructure and round up any loose crap... Check the water tight lockers and make sure they are closed tight and check the bowplane bull gears and make sure they are clear. I rode a boat where some dumbass laid a paint scraper in the gears and the damn things jammed on a trim dive."

Dutch told us that story every time we got underway.

"Good morning Captain."

"Morning... All the stores aboard?"

"Aye sir...aboard and stowed."

"Anyone passed the word to place outgoing mail on the control room chart table?"

"We passed the word last night and made a run up to Orion about 2AM to pick up some radio traffic and took the mail over."

"Well, pass the word again and run anything left up with the guard mail and sailing list...There's always some brown-bagger who comes aboard at the last minute with an armload of bills... Car payment... You know."

"Aye, sir."

"We'll be taking in lines as soon as Redfin and Grampus get underway. Call down and have a cup of coffee sent up."

"Mac..."

"Aye, sir"

"Have you drawn charts?"

"Aye, sir."

"Didja check'em for Notice to Mariners corrections?"

"That's affirmative, sir."

"Very well."

"Where are we heading, Captain?"

"North... Scheduled to operate with a pair of cans out of Newport."

"Ping time, sir?"

"Ping time."

"Sir, how come we get all the hide the weenie bullshit? I mean, how come the Squadron doesn't tag Cutlass with some of the fun stuff like getting PDCs dumped on 'em? Stuke said it's because the bastards are welded to the pier... Must be true, they are always inboard boat in the forward nest everytime we pull in."

"Armstrong... Anyone ever tell you, you talk too much?"

"All the time, sir."

"Where's that coffee? Go holler down again...and turn to son."

"Aye, sir."

"Doughnut truck on the pier..."

"Hey below!"

"Hey below, aye."

"Somebody better get a gahdam black and bitter up here for the Old Man mucho pronto..."

"Quesada is on his way up now."

"Bout time."

And so it went... Married guys returning with AWOL bags filled with clean clothes... Smiling... Grabbing a doughnut and heading below.

"Hey Stuke."

"Yo, Babe."

"How come those married guys always come aboard smiling when we're getting underway? You notice that?"

"Horsefly, they're getting laid regularly for free... And the bastards are getting out of taking their kids to the dentist and going to those gahdam PTA meetings."

"Makes sense."

"Maybe we should pop line locker lids... Pull the lifelines and stanchions and get the lockdown plates for the brow. Dex, we've gotta at least look like we're engaged in some kind of productive work or Dutch will be up here going into one of his 'you worthless bastards' routines."

"Screw Dutch."

"Yeah... You and what six other guys? You ever see the arms on that sonuvabitch? If he ever hit a guy they'd hafta pull the poor bastard out of the heel of his boot."

"He's a gorilla in a size ten Chief's hat."

"You'd better stow that or spend the rest of your life going around with a Masonic ring for a front tooth."

Looking back, it was mindless, senseless bullshit... With conversation to match. It never meant anything at the time, just a bunch of guys going to work early Monday morning. Guys whose entire inventory of earthly possessions could fit in your mother's bread box. Guys who cheerfully shared anything they had with each other. They did not know it at the time... Or would have thought much about it if someone said it... At nineteen, riding future scapyard inventory in Squadron Six, consisted of pooling resources for cold beer... Spending an inordinate amount of your spare time finding some gal with easily removable panties and getting yourself out of hot water with one or more elements of Naval authority.

You had no idea at the time that you and those goofy bastards you were sharing ragged foul weather gear and strong coffee with, would be forever bound by a silver pin over your pocket... Or that 40 odd years later, you would find each other in a parking lot outside of a Holiday Inn in Pittsburgh.

You would stand there with your bride and yell,

"Adrian Stuke, you big bastard... Man, you're a sight for sore eyes... Jeezus, it's good to see you!"

And two old, porked up, in need of overhaul, idiots would hug each other... Two, forever connected prizewinning jerks who had once had the world by the tail and every oyster they pried open contained either a pearl or a liberty card.

The Value of Bullshit by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There were nights laying alongside with the old girl putting a strain on her lines, keeping her properly aligned in the nest, that it was damn good to be nineteen and alive. Looking back and sifting through the mental pictures that combine to form the 'connect the dots' that have become your life... They were some of the best days.

I became a 'night person' riding the boats. After 1600, the married guys slowly melted away... They had a place to go... People to see and things to do. But there were some of us who had no place to go or money to do it with... The boat was home... We were the raggedy-ass 'stay aboards'... The kids who turned up for evening chow and some tired-ass movie.

When we got tired of the movie or found out it was one we had seen a half-dozen times on a run the year before, we'd crawl topside.

We had guys who knew guys on other boats and would go visiting. They were known as the 'gahdam grasshoppers'.

"Hey Dex, you gonna go grasshoppering tonight? Or, you wanna get a Hearts game up?"

"Screw Hearts... I'm not up for losin' another fist-load of wampum tonight. Think I'll go up topside and if nobody has his ass planted on the after capstan, just sit and listen to the water slap up against the tanks."

"Want company?"

"Sure why not? Grab your foul weather jacket and a cup of coffee... If you want something to sit on, there's an empty MEK can up forward next to the trunk in the beartrap."

Sharing time with a shipmate was not wasted time... Sharing dreams of what you wanted in the future... Knowing that a guy was helping to put his kid sister through nursing school or sending money to an eighty-year old granny to put a new roof on her falling down house, made it a lot easier to tolerate his stupid opinions, his idiotic devotion to a loser team and his loyalty to the Ford Motor Company. It is very easy to overlook a lot of dumb stuff a guy says when you know his mom is fighting a losing

battle with a terminal condition. Knowing what is inside men's hearts is what makes sub sailors a tight crew. Anyone who tells you otherwise, never rode smokeboats.

So you sat there, listening to the waves created by stuff passing up and down the Elisabeth river slosh up and down your tanks... Watched the shadows made by your screwguards on the gently rising and falling water between you and the next boat in the nest. You drank bottom of the pot coffee and flipped Marlboro butts into the darkness... Inventoried the stars and engaged in what was affectionately known to old-time boatsailors as 'bullshitting'.

Civilians call it the art of 'gentle conversation.' The words 'gentle' or 'genteel' never fit the verbal exchange of submariners, so it was just called bullshitting.

Bullshitting in it's purest form has a thread that allows you to jump from subject to subject... Apply totally stupid logic to solve exceptionally complex problems... Evaluate prominent people far more successful than yourself and discuss the probable merits of having sex with beautiful women who, on a clear day, wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot boathook.

"Dex, whad'dya think of that Sputnik?"

"I don't."

"Don't what?"

"Think about Sputnik. Could care less... It's a harmless little space toy. Can't see why everybody figures it's a big deal. Have no interest in space. To me, it's a big empty void with nothing going on in it, like the inside of a basketball."

"You think the gahdam Russians really want to blow us all up?"

"Who cares? Whatever you and I think doesn't matter a whole helluva lot. If they try, they're going to get one big surprise, 'cause they are going to get a butt-load of that stuff those boomer boats are hauling around and chunks of Russians and pieces of Russian-made crap is gonna be landing all over Kansas for three days."

"You really think that?"

"Yeah."

"How 'bout Kroot-chef?"

"What about Kroot-chef?"

"You think he's a crazy man?"

"Hell, all Russians gotta be nuts... You gotta be crazy as a North Georgia hoot owl to live in that gahdam dump."

"Dex, when you were a kid, were you scared of the atomic bomb?"

"Didn't have time to be scared of the atom bomb... I was afraid that Dracula was gonna find me."

"How old were you when you had your first sexual experience?"

"Eight."

"Eight?"

"Yeah... We had a little girl in the neighborhood who set up a medical clinic in her old man's tool shed. She got buck nekkit and let me examine her... I mean she hung her panties and pinafore on a lawn mower handle and Doctor Dex did a complete diagnosis. I couldn't understand why her chest wasn't getting lumpy and how in the hell a baby was gonna get out her belly button. My medical career came to 'All Stop' when her Mom caught us... My medical career lasted about thirty minutes and raised more questions than it answered."

"I had somethin' like that"

"Yeah... What happened?"

"I had an ugly cousin named Alice... She let me lift her dress and pull down her drawers."

"You learn anything?"

"Yeah... It was a lot of fun."

"How'd you end up riding the boats?"

"Wanted to get out of Utah."

"Hell, there's a lotta ways to get outta Utah without riding a gahdam submarine."

"I just joined the Navy and ended up at New London... The rest kinda took care of itself."

"You want another cup of coffee?"

"Sure, why not."

"Hey Below!"

"Yo..."

"How 'bout one of you worthless bastards drawing two cups for two worthless idiots topside?"

"Sure thing... How do you take it?"

"Black and bitter... Make it two black and bitters."

That is what bullshitting was. Aimless, go nowhere conversation between men who had no life beyond the tanktops. Lads whose closest friends slept in the same bunks on rotation. Kids in the sunrise of life, indivisibly forever linked by common experience that no one who never did it will ever understand.

Bullshitting was the natural mastic that bonded us in the cohesive team we were... It was the sticky side of the Submarine Force flypaper.

"Think I'll head below, knock the lid out of a can of peaches then hit the rack."

"There's a couple of cans of peaches in the waterway outboard Stuke's rack... The sonuvabitch has a fully stocked grocery store in that outboard waterway. That's an E-3 secret so don't let the below decks watch or anything above a second class catch you going in there... And also keep your mitts off the five boxes of Grape Nuts... They're mine."

"Do you guys always hold out on the crew?"

"It's not holding out... It's E-3 survival knowledge. When you get qualified, we'll tell you where we stash the peanut butter. The COB found four boxes of Saltine crackers in the OBA locker and found out we had six frozen pizzas in a box marked 'liver' in the reefer. He was actually pissed... The idiot eats liver. We thought nobody actually ate liver on purpose."

"Well, like I said... I'm heading below."

"So go... Jeezus, you can't get lost... Just follow the salvage air plates until you get to a big hole with light at the bottom of it."

And so, you sat there. The air got chilly and every now and then the topside watch would wander aft... Check his lines and mumble some gripe about having the damn eight to twelve.

"Yeah, it's a helluva way to make a living... And think we could be freckle inspectors in a WAVE barracks. If I ever catch the sonuvabitch that invented these diesel boats, I'm gonna cut out his heart and eat it."

"Naw... He's probably some officer who can smell a boatsailor a mile away."

"Dick, anyone tell you, you are as nuts as me?"

"No, I'd kill myself."

"You seen Stuke?"

"Yeah, he went over about an hour ago... Had some good-looking honey waiting for him up in the pierhead parking lot... He was looking for you... When he didn't find you, he hauled."

"My luck."

"Gotta go scribble in the topside log."

On a clear night you could count the stars up in that empty space and wonder if that Sputnik contraption was really up there running around.

You knew that somewhere, some place, Admiral Arliegh Burke had the helm. He knew and understood his bluejackets. With Admiral Burke standing the conn everything was going to be O.K.... I never had seen God so I didn't know that he actually existed... But, I had seen Admiral Burke once, and that was all I needed... He was a man who was the ultimate leader and we all knew instinctively that he was the kind of sailor who fully understood the value of E-3 bullshit with coffee.

Stuff We Missed by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Life is a little weird when you attempt to take a fairly serious look at it.

If you went out and beat someone to death with a gahdam coal shovel, got convicted and got sent to prison, they would give you a room with your own rack, a window, fresh air, regular hot showers, and access to a TV... And with the current state of American justice, you would be back in eighteen months.

If you volunteered for submarines, you didn't get any of that. Guys at Sing Sing were living a helluva lot better than you were. Hell, they probably got enough blankets and didn't have to steal them from each other to keep from freezing to death.

But, they also never missed stuff.

They stayed connected to what was going on in the world.

We didn't. Aborigines in the darkest jungle in Pango-Pango knew more about what was going on in the world than we did. Hell, for one thing, they knew what the weather in their part of the world was like. You can be naked, eating raw lizards and praying to a dead owl and still know that rain was falling on your empty head.

We lived in a world where sunrise and sunset was controlled by an electrical switch and if you were an E-3, time became damn near meaningless. And we lost our link with the civilized world. In short, we missed what was going on in the world around us.

From 1959 to 1965, I have no idea who won the World Series, what happened to Y.A. Tittle, where *Old Gold* cigarettes went, what happened to those Latex rubber girdles that were damn near impossible to get past in high school, and where all the Edsel cars went. I know that somewhere Kennedy got shot, men went into space and somehow, Indo-China became Viet-Nam... How, why and when is still fuzzy as hell.

You would come in and find yourself parked in some rat hole bar dining on salted peanuts and beer and doing your damndest to wind down. Some guy would say something like,

"Hey sailor, whatcha think of John Glenn?"

"Who's John Glenn?"

"The guy they shot into space."

"What did he do that got him shot into space?"

"He's one of them astronaut fellows... Them NASA spacemen."

"I'll take your word for it, sir... Honestly, I haven't got any idea what you are talking about."

"Jeezus, son where in the hell have you been?"

"Out in the ocean sir... Ask me anything about dirty laundry, freezing your butt and seagull crap and I'm your expert."

Some guy would drop down the after battery hatch and yell,

"Man, you won't believe this you dumb bastards but Major League Ball Clubs are movin' all around."

"No shit?"

"No shit, Horsefly."

"Hey... They still makin' Krispy Kreme Doughnuts?"

"Yeah..."

"Well screw everything else, when does the truck come rolling down the pier?"

It's not that we were stupid and totally unconcerned, it was strictly a matter of access. If you grow up living in a mayonnaise jar, the only thing that matters is when the sonuvabitch who unscrews the lid shows up.

"Hey... They're sendin' Army guys over to some place that sounds like Ding Bang Foo... They're helping some little chink guys fight the Reds."

"Never heard of it."

Then the Chief of the Boat would light his cigar and say,

"Boys, if it ain't on the Halifax to Hispanola chart, it ain't in your gahdam ballpark. Knock off the bullshit... Toss them cups in the deep sink and haul your worthless butts topside and turn to before I have to plant a size eleven brogan in your loafing hip pockets."

Dutch was not what one could call an avid student of current events.

"Jack, didja ever hear of the Congo?"

"Yeah, I heard of it.... Somewhere over in Africa. The bastards don't have a Navy, so if you ain't writing for National Geographic, forget it."

We were mostly around nineteen. The world expects you to be dumb and unconnected at nineteen. Hell, you could make Third Class and not understand how zippers work.

Riding submarines was a lot like watching a three-reel movie where someone had high-jacked reel # two. We had a clear picture of everything before New London and a clear picture of everything after we tossed our gear in the lucky bag and passed the Receiving Station gate. What happened in between is anybody's guess.

Before Sub School, all the guys had flat top haircuts and the gals wore pop up bras, saddle shoes and smelled like a gardenia garden. When I got out, guys had hair hanging halfway down their ass and girls were braless, wearing tie-dyed T-shirts and smelled like a bus station bathroom.

So much for progress.

I remember going to a high school football game...

"Hey darlin', what's that hanging out the back of number 42's helmet?"

"His hair, sweetheart."

"You gotta be lyin'... Jeezus, is the sonuvabitch queer?"

"No Dex... He's every girls dream."

Boy, that sent a message... There wasn't a hair on my head over an eighth of an inch long.

"What do they do for sex... Check into a motel and give each other home permanents and swap panties?"

"Oh, be serious. Ever hear of The Beatles?"

"Yeah... They crunch when you step on'em."

I spent the rest of the game hoping some sonuvabitch nailed him and rung his bell.

The Beatles... What a worthless waste of manhood that was.

After riding the boats I never caught up. Never understood poor personal hygiene... Looking like bums... War protesters... Psychedelic anything... Dope... Gene McCarthy... Hubert Humphrey... Gremlin cars... A whole lot of stuff. I'm still living twenty years behind.

But the Navy gave us Dolphins and a seabag load of great memories of tough times spent with damn fine men who in the words of John McCain, understood the concept of serving a cause greater than ones self.

The world changed... We never did.

We Will Always Remember Our Boats

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Boats have personalities. I know that would seem strange to a person who never rode one... They have no point of reference. There is nothing in civilian life that can steal your heart like a sweet-running submarine.

The rascals had a sinister look because we have been conditioned by their history to look on them as we look on killer sharks. If you consider what a service that was relatively small in comparison to our total forces deployed did in World War II, it is not

without reason that our underwater boat service carries such a reputation. We literally shot the bottom out of Jap shipping. The floor of the Pacific is littered with the rusting hulks that comprised the Japanese merchant fleet. These small boats hauling 24 torpedoes and 80 men parked the majority of undelivered logistical support destined to support Tojo's little fanatical monkeys, beyond reach. The men who rode those boats spent their wartime service, alone far beyond the lines of U.S. controlled waters deep in hostile territory... They were, and remain, damn special people and on the list of my personal heroes, those tough case-hardened bastards head the list.

So, they handed us ships with well-established lethality and a silver pocket insignia with a proud history and an awesome reputation.

The boats looked lean and mean. Even laying alongside the pier, submarines look like hungry carnivores waiting on a meal.

When you first go aboard an operating diesel boat... Your first thought is,

"Jeezus, how in the hell do men exist in these cramped rascals for weeks at a time?"

It had nothing to do with claustrophobia... They made sure you weren't carrying a dose of that at New London.

Like a kid said at Great Lakes,

"Doc, I ain't got no diseases I can't spell."

No, you took one look at the inside of a boat and your illusions of a life of swashbuckling action and adventure did a swan dive down the dumper. They were jam packed with all sorts of pipes, valves, mechanical stuff and the human element seemed to have just wrapped itself around all that crap. But, the happy-go-lucky sonuvabitches didn't seem to care...

"Hey kid... You the new guy?"

"I guess so."

"Where you from?"

"East Tennessee originally, but I'm living up near D.C. now."

"East Tennessee... Christ, you're gonna be right at home. The boat is crawlin' with you damn hillbilly bastards... West Virginia, Kentucky... Hell, you name it and we'll have some damn hick from there."

"Where YOU from?"

"New Jersey... Gods' country."

"Been through New Jersey, God sure picked a dump to live in."

"You're gonna fit in, kid... You've got a mouth on you. There's two side lockers over on the port side... Jack'll show you... Stow your gear and anything you can't fit in there goes in a locker you rent up at Bells, in a box to mail home or you can shitcan it on the pier."

"You mean all I get is two of those bread box lookin' things?"

"Boy, you Tennessee boys figure stuff out real fast... You must be one of those rare bastards who made it past the third grade."

"Yeah... In fourth grade, they taught you to be smart enough to never move to New Jersey."

"Hey Horsefly... When do we eat around here?"

"Hell, hillbilly man, you'll find out... You're gonna be dishing it out. Now, go stow your gear, get in your dungarees and haul your non-qual ass up to the messdeck."

It wasn't exactly like being welcomed to the neighborhood by the Chamber of Commerce, but I was to come to know that it was the first step in the chain of acceptance and that being 'roughed up' by a shipmate, having 'tin cans tied to your tail' was a friendly gesture. If the animals didn't like you they wouldn't rag you... They just ignored non-producers and got rid of them.

In a short time, the boat became home... You didn't worry about lack of space, you just crawled over each other like rats in a rat tunnel.

At sea, the walking surface moved... Sometimes like an oil drum bouncing down a mountain. The human body could take a helluva beating in high seas... You just cussed and bounced off everything in the boat including valve handles, hatch frames and every idiot who volunteered for sub duty knew that being smacked all over hell and half Georgia was just part of the package.

One thing always amazed me. Heavy seas in the North Atlantic were unbelievable. Mountains of raging water rising and falling in powerful swells. Your ship got constantly smashed by towering walls of black water. The old girl took it all... She gyrated in all directions... Creaked and groaned but she kept going. You couldn't help but admire the minds behind her design and appreciate the strength of the old girl.

You became so confident in her ability to withstand anything, that you could rack out and fall asleep like a baby in a raging sea. When you could do that, you and your boat had become lifelong lovers.

To everyone but submarine sailors that must sound stupid, but if you ever attended a reunion where a boat and the lads who rode her came together, you would see an aging bastard cross the brow and pat inanimate objects topside to pay their respect to an old girl that has always owned a piece of their heart... An old flame they will never forget... An old saltwater whore who showed them a good time for a chipping hammer back rub and hundreds of coats of paint.

Nobody remembers when a ship inched her way into his heart... But all we know is that she did. It was a subtle seduction where you just woke up one day and she'd stenciled her hull numbers on your heart.

And you connected with the men you served with for the simple reason that what you did, how you lived and the things that made up your life and the pride you had, would never be understood by anyone else in your life. It would never be as important or mean as much as it did to those who experienced it... Together... The crew.



We had the ship and we will always have each other.

The USS Orion (AS-18) Revisited by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Tenders are great big contraptions that are a lot like buildings that sit in the water, loaded with folks who don't go anywhere and containing guys called Master at Arms whose sole purpose for existing is to pin hell on E-3s. They wear sheriff's badges and from the size of damn near all of them, they had to be hauling dead horse allotments to Budweiser.

The characteristics that distinguished tenders from the architectural structures at DES SUB piers, like warehouses, were (a) they were sitting in saltwater, (b) they rusted, and (c) having a thirty-foot gangway, separated them from shore duty.

From time to time, they took in submarine orphans in transit awaiting the return of their assigned boats. They billeted these unfortunate sonuvabitches in a place called 'T' Division. 'T' Division was a hell hole up forward near the bow on Orion. It was hot, the head stunk and it was full of hand-me-down mattresses rescued from a slum dump. It was where all the flies in North America held morning quarters. 'T' Division on the AS-18 made those cages in Gitmo look like the Hilton.

The Orion must've had some kind of propulsion because it actually moved every now and then. But between these rare occasions, they would muster the enginemen and machinist mates in the messdeck and show them pictures of mechanical equipment so they didn't forget what the stuff looked like... And grown men sat around trying to remember exactly what it was that all that gear did... Something like a quiz show at a nuthouse.

Rumor had it that the machine rooms on Orion had been actually taken over by animals resulting from evolutionary mutation... Twenty-five foot pier rats and cockroaches that ate sheet metal... So it was perfectly understandable not to want to go in there.

Somebody told us that the Chairman of Communist China once lodged a complaint with the United Nations, that roots from the Orion's hull had grown completely through the earth and were coming up in China and wrecking the streets. We called it communist propaganda, but it might have had some truth in it.

The main agricultural product of this big metal idiot farm was clean white hats. They had men called radiomen... Guys who parked their butts in a nice, quiet air-conditioned compartment, did crossword puzzles and watched paper emerge from weird machines. Every now and then, the transmitted wisdom that came out of the mechanical crap in the radio palace had to be conveyed to the wardroom. Such trips required that the personnel hauling these gems of naval thought process, be attired in the manner depicted on recruiting posters.

Every non-rated bluejacket riding submarines knew that every radioman owned at least four hundred clean, starched white hats and had a burning desire deep within his heart that boatsailors would look sharp on liberty. All we had to do was periodically harvest them... Which we did.

Going back to the MAAs... Master at Arms. Tenders were literally crawling with these characters. I don't know where the Navy found these guys. I suspected that most of them spent their formative years living in trees, eating bananas. E-3s spent a lot of time being accosted by these giant hulks and being asked stupid questions, like...

"Son, what in the hell are you doing?"

You were smart enough to know that "*Stealing you bastards' blind*" was not a good answer...

"Oh sir, my duty officer sent me over to pick up a hydro caniffing retractor coupling from Capt. Rice, up in Squadron."

The secret was connecting your mission with officer stuff. These dumb bastards knew instinctively that their 'Handmaiden from Hell' status depended on not tangling up officer stuff.

"Well son what'n the hell are you doing up here in the radio shack?"

"I'm lost."

"Lost? You're... WHAT?"

"Lost. Some guy gave me this up ladder, down ladder, thwartships, midships... Frame thirty-two, starboard passageway shit... And I got lost."

"How long you been in the Navy, son?"

The bastards always asked that. Guys that have been in the Navy a hundred years, love to lay that one on a non-rated guy.

"Six months, Chief."

That was a sure fire 'Get out of the bucket' answer. It was like having '*DUMBSHIT*' tattooed on your eyelids.

"Six months? Jeezus kid, didn't you learn anything at Great Lakes?"

"No sir... I'm a two-week reserve from Possum Fork, Alabama."

The words 'Two-week reserve' can give a Master at Arms total cardiac arrest.

I had done postgraduate work under the best leading seaman in the submarine force... Adrian Stuke. The Stuke method of E-3 survival told you that when you were snorkeling around in ever increasing hot water, 'Get stupid fast' was the best course of action. The words '*Two-week reservist*' could turn your dumbass credentials into a cement job in two seconds. Old salts usually threw back the stupid fish.

"Son... Just get the hell outta here."

Tenders were really neat places to get lost in when you wanted to waste time and pick up stuff they didn't issue to pigboats. It was like *Bum's Night at Buckingham Palace*... You could roam around and see what the good life was like... And fill your pockets with stuff that wasn't bolted down or welded to the bulkheads.

That was what submarine sailors did... Because that is what they had always done. Wholesale tender theft was an integral part of the Naval Supply System. If you couldn't lay your hands on the proscribed material, you had to make do. You could usually go lightfinger something off the tender that with submarine ingenuity, you could make work.

I once sat in the after battery messdeck and cut gaskets out of a stolen hot water bottle we got off of Orion's sickbay... Using a tuna can for a pattern. The whole idea was to keep stuff working... At least that was the way it used to be. It was not criminal from the way we saw it, because nothing left the pier, except white hats.

We once unscrewed a CRS metal panel from a head stall... Took it down to the sheet metal shop and had a shield made for the DRT (dead reckoning tracer) in the conn.

Tenders were a lot like Noah's Ark, the damn things had two of everything.

Old Mother Orion is now parked in the bone yard for old worn out, no longer needed ships... Her paint is peeling away... She's rusting away and has a thirty to fifty-foot gash in her side nobody gives a damn about. She is being cannibalized for parts. In a way, that's like going to a nursing home and taking the old ladie's eyes and kidneys before they are completely dead. Sad in a way... Most of her children, the subs that nestled along her side, have already made their trips up the river to the scrap yards and a few went to the taxidermy shop, got stuffed and put out to pasture as amusement park attractions... And the lads who rode them have gray hair and get up to pee three times a night.

Something that all true boatsailors know is that we only rag those we love. In our hearts we know that Orion left the light on for us and met each arriving wayward child with fresh milk and mail. She nursed us when we were sick... Put money in our wallets... Scolded us when we were naughty and turned a blind eye to having her pockets picked.

When ships grow old, the system either eats them or lets them decompose out of sight. No storybook endings... Just one day the only thing left are old men's memories and a name and hull number on the Navy's 'stricken list'... And, old fools make jokes and rag their fellow bluejackets because that's God's gift to 'Once upon a time', long ago sailors. That's the way it has always been and hopefully always will be.

Answer Up by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

"Answer up when your name is called..."

"Schnider."

"Schnider..."

"Jeezus Christ Jack, I know you're here... I just saw you."

"No Chief, he went to draw a cup of coffee... I'll take his mail."

"Murphy..."

"Yo."

"Murph, you mean to tell me someone in West Virginia can write?"

"Not really Chief... My sister sends me stuff from the paper on coon hunts."

"Anyone eat coon on purpose?"

"Hell yeah, Chief."

"Braxton... Looks like you're behind on your car payment again."

"Mendez."

"Mendez..."

"Hey wetback! Ya got a letter from some honey in Mexico. Save me the stamps."

"Peto... Holy jumpin' Jeezus, talk about perfumed prose... This shit would turn an embalmed monk horny... Whew! Man, get that thing outta here."

And so it went until the last envelope cleared the mailbag and the men who got... And the men who failed to get, magic pages to tuck under their flashpads... Returned to whatever they should have been doing before the big canvas bag fell out of the escape trunk.

Mail was the lifeline that kept a boatsailor connected to real live people who didn't make a living breathing air full of floating crap inside an iron tube.

In the spectrum of gradations of womanhood... The ones who occupy the uppermost rung are the ones who wrote to servicemen faithfully. I mean that sincerely. Any girl who took time from whatever else she had to do in life... Took pen and paper and wrote to some lonely sonuvabitch in uniform is a saint... An honest-to-God saint. They provided welcome news from home and fuel for late night fantasies.

Some of the stuff was funny as hell. Some clown on Requin got a red hot warning that if he didn't contact his local draft board... The Selective Service would put in motion forces that would hunt his worthless butt down and have him inducted into the armed forces immediately.

One time we had been out and down for a couple of weeks and we got a 'little orphan Annie' drop... P2V out of Norfolk came roaring over at a couple hundred feet and kicked out a can full of mail... We fished it out with a boathook and envelopes containing messages from the free world and sexual frustration-triggering prose, were distributed in the control room.

There was an envelope addressed to 'Resident, USS Requin (SS-481), Fleet Post Office, New York, NY.

Which resident? We never knew but we opened it on behalf of the unknown resident. Inside was a very personal 'Dear Resident' communication and a little aluminum key. It seems some guy named Uncle Dave of Uncle Dave's Auto Sales out on Military Highway had this fabulous treasure chest full of goodies that included the title to a 1960 two-door Chevy with air conditioning and what we held on behalf of mister unknown resident, was possibly the key to the lock that would bring instant ownership.

It didn't take the overactive brains of Hogan's Alley long to project into the future, which at this point was about a week away, and know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we held the winning key... That by this time, had become known as simply 'The Magic Key'.

Problem #1. Who would hold the magic key? We created a rotational watch... The magic key keeper... And we held magic key exchange ceremonies... Feeling that the importance of the key should be understood by all aboard, we held our exchange ceremonies in the crews mess... A location where the elderly senior petty officers met to smoke pipes and stinking cigars, lie to each other, cuss the E-3 population, and listen to their arteries harden.

We would enter utilizing our version of the East German goose-step, halt and render our Hogan's Alley 'Secret Signs of Baseball' salute... And shout,

"Pre-seeeeeennt KEY!"

At which time the magic key would be held out to the subsequent guardian who would yell,

"Acceeeeeeept KEY!"

Do an about face, render the aforementioned salute plus two Chubby Checker butt rotations, and goose-step into the control room to conclude the formalities.

Problem #2. We were scheduled to be out when the day... The only day that our dear Uncle Dave was going to allow use of the magic key. Our skipper failed to appreciate the importance of canceling our scheduled exercise and returning to pier 22... So we decided to appeal directly to Congress, the United Nations and General Motors. We worked on one of the most literate appeals ever penned by wronged American patriots... Who called themselves the 'Committee of the Most Worthy Keepers of the

Magic Key.' And we certainly didn't appreciate being called silly bastards by the COB who posted our document in the G.D.U. These were the days of rampant insensitivity in the submarine force.

Mail was what kept us going. Life is funny. I once saw a program on maximum-security prisons... You know, the places where they send serial killers, guys who have non-consensual sex with nuns then hit 'em in the head with a tire iron and guys who boil babies to make soup. It hit me... These guys live in better conditions, get a helluva lot more exercise and sunlight, and they don't seem to be getting bug juice and panther pee.

The difference was we volunteered and were right where we wanted to be.

Being a Torpedo Pusher by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

One morning I was eating my customary in-port breakfast... Three eggs scrambled, Spam and toast. I can't be the only sonuvabitch in the known world who loves Spam... The supermarket shelves are packed with Spam cans and I'm sure as hell not supporting that kind of production at the rate of a couple cans a week. I just may be the only guy who will admit it... It's like IC Electricians having sex with owls... They all do it but none of them own up to it.

Where in th' hell was I? Oh yeah, I was wrapping myself around morning chow when the COB comes up, puts his hand on my shoulder and tells me to lay topside when I get through "Stuffing my face." (Chief had the social grace of things that lived in trees in Kenya).

I finished... Scraped my scraps into the sharpshooter bucket, handed my plate to the kid douching dishes in the deep sink, made no attempt to tuck my shirttail in and climbed topside.

It became clear that the Chief of the Boat and I were going to have another 'father and son' discussion about the course of my future. These intimate moments always began,

"Armstrong, I am firmly convinced that you are not as stupid as you do your best to convince me you are... Nobody is that gahdam worthless. There are times when you appear quite smart... Then, you go and do something very dumb and destroy my faith in you... Why do you do that? Why do you take pride in being Clown King of the Second Fleet? Where is your ambition? Where is your desire to seek advancement and rise to the leadership challenge presented by service in submarines? Armstrong, what IS your problem?"

"Listening to this bullshit every time you and I have one of these 'Come to Jeezus' sessions."

"Dex, I am just about to toss your worthless butt into the bullring of life. From this point on, consider yourself a torpedoman striker."

"Jeezus Christ Chief... Is this negotiable? Is there anything short of an abnormal sex act that you would take to forget we had this little career adjustment conversation?"

"Get used to it, sweet pea."

"Does this mean I gotta go up to the forward room and listen to old men snore... Officers going to the head... Stewards cuss in Philipino... And the gahdam ocean trying to flatten bow buoyancy?"

"No, the deal I made with Dyshart to take you, specifically stated that you would remain the Crown Prince of Idiotville in the after battery alley. Your new sea daddy will adopt you only if you live in another location in case lunacy is contagious."

And that was how I became a torpedoman. I was the victom of a kind of shotgun wedding...

"Fleet idiot, do you take heavy tubular ordinance for your wedded wife? To love, honor and obey until your DD 214 doth part?"

"I do."

"Do you torpedo gang, take this self-professed jerk... To love, honor and obey... To crush his toes... Put knots on his head... To dive tubes... To check NAVOL monitors... Rig loading hatches... Clean Cosmoline-covered spare parts... To check exploders... To be little Miss Mary Sunshine gopher and low man on the totem pole whore for every sadistic animal calling himself a torpedoman?"

"I do."

"I now pronounce you man and gang. You may now kiss all the torpedo pusher's fannies."

And that was how it was. How a kid from East Tennessee was kidnapped and forced to marry the ugly toad that never became a princess.

My career change put me in direct contact with mature senior rated men... Family men so gahdam henpecked that they had to make a deal with 'Rent-A-Set', the testicle leasing folks, to enjoy overseas liberty. They taught me the torpedoman's trade and I taught them how to double team and steal anything not firmly fastened to Orion's hull. Being a Master Orion Thief was a real asset.

Loved the torpedo gang... Great guys. The low man got to be the owner-operator of the forward and after signal ejectors... The Pyrotechnic Prince. I got to shoot 'smokes and

flares'... Wrestle Mark 14s and 16s... Mark 27s and 37s... And clean the lower flats. I got to rig the torpedo recovery boom and handle a vang line... And a snubber when we slid 'em back into an elevated skid in the forward room. And I got the honor of re-establishing the collapsible frame you had to drop to get fish into the room.

If it weighed a ton and had to be monkeyed with, it belonged to Mr. Career Ladder Climber.

Requin had no tubes aft. When they converted her to be a radar picket in the 40s, they cut out the four after tubes and never reinstalled them when they converted her back to straight 'SS'. They put in a big 'poker table' with a horseshoe-shaped seat that had over padded red naugahide cushions.

It was a great place for poker and beer... Convenient too, allowing you to dispose of empty beer cans by shooting the sonuvabitches out of the signal ejector. Because of this unique feature, it was not unusual to see the heavy hitters of the payday poker games crossing the nest and dropping down Requin's after hatch.

"0600... Gentlemen, straight stud or draw poker... No bugs... None of that one-eyed jack shit... No gahdam Girl Scout camp games... Nobody is interested in any games your gahdam grandmother taught you when you were sick... High-low split pots are okay... Any friggin game invented in Louisiana and played by Cajuns is out... Oh, You, Tee, OUT! Any game that takes more than 15 seconds to explain is out. Progressive pots are a no-no... Nickel, dime, quarter, and maximum three raises... After 2300... Table stakes shoot-the-moon poker until Saturday morning prep flag. Should the sound-powered phone buzz three times indicating wardroom occupant heading aft, chips in table pot go in the Colonel Sanders Chicken bucket, all hands get tossed into this white hat that goes into this side locker and players responsible to get money and chips in their pockets... Put full cans or partially full cans in the locker with the Pabst Blue Ribbon sticker on it... And shoot the signal ejector. When the officer steps through the watertight door, I will say '...and she had a glass eye.' and everyone laughs. You got it?"

The torpedomen were responsible for the coordination of enlisted vice and clandestine activity.

As time passed by, I did my damndest to mature but in spite of my disconnect with the planet, I recognized the wisdom of my placement. Torpedomen are strange folks... I fit right in.

When I see nuke movies, I see the fish running into the tubes by some hydraulic ramming system. I wonder if the lads of the present force know that there was a time when torpedo ordinance was as heavy as an average car and grown men had to jackass the sonuvabitches into the tubes. Having been part of the jackass team, I can tell you that the distance from skid to stop bolt was a mile and a half on a hard reload night. It cost a gallon of sweat and made for an interesting evening... We didn't need exercise bikes, weights or treadmills to get a workout on Requin.

We were good at what we did... Not bragging, that's just a fact. Officers felt good about our record of dependability.

One night, we had a malfunction on a one fish shot. The damn thing cleared the outer door, failed to activate and went straight to the bottom.

Over the conn circuit, we heard the word 'Range'.

I was standing close to the guy holding the forward room handset. I said,

"The only way those sonuvabitches will get any range on that one will be for the Old Man to throw the old girl into reverse."

My comments were picked up on the handset and within the hour I got called to the wardroom.

"Armstrong..."

"Aye, sir."

"Armstrong, your worst enemy is your big mouth."

"Aye, sir."

"Your comment didn't win you the Mr. Wonderful Award in the conn tonight."

"Aye, sir."

"Do you want to be the ship's clown... Is that what you're striking for?"

That hurt... Because it was true.

After that, I eventually became a respected member of a great gang. I was still stupid... I still stepped on my crank occasionally, but I worked at being good.

A couple of months later, we delivered two critical hits on a firing evolution. We got a 'Well done' from the Old Man. Chief Long grabbed the handset and said,

"Sir, both were maintained and loaded by the ship's clown."

"Damn fine work... Clown."

From then on, things were great. The gang was great.

Torpedo pushers were a rare breed who never tired of telling the entire crew that their entire purpose was to get us to where we could deliver lethal valentines to nasty people. It was our way of triggering interesting reactions.

If you weren't a torpedo pusher, you missed something wonderful... The forward room was a great place to work... Except when the damn stewards racked out up in the Bridal Suite below the loading hatch and played their gahdam ukes and sang weird songs... And when officers sang in the shower.

The Snooze Hole by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Below the walking deck in the crew's mess, there was a storeroom known simply as the 'dry stores hold'. It had racks for cans on each side and a place where you could stack boxes between them.

Cooks would yell to a messcook,

"Hey numb nuts... Drop down and toss me up six cans of bean soup."

"Sure... Six cans, aye."

Adrian Stuke, the naval authority on methods of goofing off without getting nailed, showed me the great potential of this place early in our association. He showed me how by leveling the boxes, you could create an area that when covered with a couple of foul weather jackets made a great place to catch a little 'nobody knows where I am' snooze... Something damn near impossible for an E-3 on a snorkel barge.

Only the skipper had a private location all his own where he could go to catch some 'Zs' all by himself. You know... A place where no one would put a foot wearing a stinking sock next to his nose on his way to an upper rack... And he didn't have thirty guys snoring like hell all around him like a chorus of sea lions. But on the other hand, the Old Man had to wake up a steward if he wanted a snack... All Stuke and I had to do was reach over... Grab a can of peaches... Take our jackknives and knock the lid out of the can... Reach up and take the spoon Stuke kept hidden up near the bean cans... Eat the peaches... Lick the spoon off and poke it back with the bean cans. Kind of a E-3 'Breakfast in bed'.

The skipper had guys waking him up to give him his 8 O'clock fuel reports and tell him when contacts closed to within five thousand yards.

Guys would open the manhole cover and yell,

"Gahdammit Dex you loafing sonuvabitch... Toss up six cans of mushrooms!"

The skipper never got any of that. And, the Old Man didn't have twenty or thirty idiots laughing and stomping all over his stateroom overhead at the good parts of the evening movie... And he couldn't lay in his rack and read colorful can labels.

If you worked it right, it wasn't half-bad being a qualified E-3... You just had to find the good life.

Life in the Alley by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Hogans Alley was the after section of the port passageway in The After Battery compartment... Six racks and Docs' medical locker. If you lived there, you were non-rated, you were deck force and you were a rat. The mothers of the lads who 'holed-up' in The Alley would have shot themselves if they saw the place after two weeks out... Politicians would call it a major disaster area. The Chief of the Boat gave up on it... The place looked like the part of town your folks avoided when grandmother came for a visit. Officers tried like hell to avoid and ignore it... In short, it looked like Nagasaki the morning after. It was my home.

Someone I knew once went to Russia. When he got back he said,

"Dex, you wouldn't believe the place. Thirty people crowded into one room... They don't own anything... They work unbelievable hours... There aren't enough beds so people take turns sleeping... They're so gahdam poor, they have to pool resources to get a bottle of Vodka to pass around. You would have to see the gahdam place to believe it."

Hell, we had the sonuvabitches beat. The bastards in Russia could see the sky, knew when it was raining and could open a window and get fresh air. I knew a place where we had the Reds beat by a mile... Hogans Alley.

Men on death row have more space. A guy in a casket has more space to stretch out in and it all belongs to him... Nobody wakes him up every eight hours and tells him to crawl out of the box to make room for an incoming stiff... And nobody pokes a foot wearing a sock that hasn't seen soap and water for two weeks in his face on the way to an upper vault.

My wife once saw this homeless individual (we used to call 'em bums) pushing a grocery cart and dragging two shopping bags full of accumulated crap.

"Dex, look at that poor man. Everything he owns is in that cart and two bags."

"Hell darlin', a diesel boat sailor would tell you the sonuvabitch has an excessive amount of gear."

To her that was just another of a long line of insensitive comments that she had come to expect from the idiot she married. Any guy who lived in The Alley would have told her that was no bullshit.

Let's inventory the stuff we had...

A Gillette razor.

Everyone had a Gillette because it made bumming blades a lot easier and the damn things were built like a Sherman tank.. You could drop one of the bastards out of a B-29 at 40,000 feet onto an asphalt parking lot, pick the sonuvabitch up and shave with it. Anvils, bowling balls and Gillette razors... Damn near indestructible.

Zippo lighter made in Taiwan.

Not really a Zippo but a Zippo knockoff called a 'Zingo'. Fake sonuvabitch. Looks like Zippo... Works like shit. You do better to light smokes by rubbing two sticks together. Eats flints like a rat tail file. Bought one once that had dolphins and insignia glued on... They fell off, demonstrating Chinese quality control and the wisdom of our Oriental purchase choice. None of 'em were worth a damn when air wouldn't support combustion.

Bead chain and dogtags.

Mostly for inspection and to check periodically if you forget what religion you were. Nobody wore the damn things...They got hung up on stuff and they could drive you nuts when you slept. We all knew if you went below 800 feet, everyone would know who you were... Maybe where you were... That you would be there one helluva long time and no one would be checking gahdam dog tags and besides, the sharks had a helluva hard time digesting the sonuvabitches.

Loose change.

Very important for those two days before payday Easter egg hunts you got into when some idiot yelled,

"Anyone wanna go in on a pizza?"

Dog eared photo of girl.

The photo of an absolute knockout of a girl who used to love you but was now in college and letting Joe Cool feel her up in a car that daddy bought him. All because you made a four-year date with the North Atlantic. Good for reference on nights when you were starting to forget what major league tits looked like.

Skin books.

The medium of exchange on smokeboats. Your personal wealth was measured by the depth of your girlie book stash. Fortunes changed hands regularly. Paperback books on lesbian love were big because it was somehow comforting to know the guys back home were not getting everything.

Keys.

Everyone had them, but damn near nobody knew what they went to. Bootcamp locker... Car you used to own... Back door at former girls house... Who the hell knew?

Foo-Foo Juice.

Bottles of Aqua-Velva... Old Spice... Mennens after shave... Vitalis... Lucky Tiger... Hell, you name it. The stuff that made the Alley smell like a cheap New Orleans whorehouse when they opened the showers for liberty.

Comb.

Rarely used. Did come in handy for scratching those hard to reach spots on your back or itch-relief for your athlete's foot sores.

Church Key.

Part of the equipment every submarine bluejacket carried in case you overhauled a Budweiser supply ship carrying beer to the Air Force Officers Clubs overseas and the Old Man could work a deal.

New Testament.

Good for when you said, "I swear to God" and had to prove you actually knew who He was. Also had a place where you could write in your name and address, in case you forgot who you were and where you came from.

Letters.

Mostly from girls telling you that they were true... Loved you more than anything and would wait a million years just to feel your arms around them.. Who didn't.

Draft Card.

Good for a laugh when you needed one. Usually carried along with other cards for free drinks in places you'd never go again.

Toothbrush and Toothpaste.

What the hell happened to Ipana toothpaste?

Sunglasses.

Cheap drugstore sunglasses to replace the two pair of Ray Bans. One pair that you last heard bouncing through the inside of the sail when you were clearing the bridge... And the pair that made a real nice forty-dollar crunch when Stuke stepped on'em.

Rubbers.

To poke your wristwatch in and tie a knot in, which would waterproof your Timex if you had to swim back to the boat... And other things, if you got lucky.

High School Graduation Ring.

To show to The Chief of the Boat when he called you an idiot with a second grade mentality.

Sea Stores Cigarettes.

God-awful stale smokes that the tobacco companies unloaded on the Navy to sell beyond the continental limits of the United States because a hard-up bluejacket will

smoke damn near anything and they knew you couldn't punch them in the nose at sea. But at five cents a pack, a diesel boat sailor would have smoked horse manure packed in a Tampon tube.

Bag of Bull Durham and a Pack of Rolling Papers.

No man would smoke homemade butts if he had a choice... Sometimes you didn't.

Reciept from Bells Naval Tailors.

For the Requin patch the gal sewed on your white jumper that read U.S.S. Redfin when you got a good look at it... And you said,

"What the hell...the stencil inside read Miller, J.E. and you finally had something Stuke didn't have."

Bottle of Pills.

Doc gave them to you and wrote 'Take 2 every four hours'... Musta worked, you were still alive.

Hell, I could go on but you guys were there... You remember.

There were times when you crawled into your rack tucked your foulweather jacket under your head, listened to the steady drip in the overhead air conditioning condensate pan and wondered just what contribution you were making to the Defense of the Free World, living like a Hindu in a coal mine... And you listened to a shipmate rooting through his bunk locker drawer, making sounds like a socket wrench band... And you wondered what life must be like on those new nuke boats that smelled like the inside of a new car... Everything bright, new and all shined up and there you were riding a boat that sold you a lighter that the insignia fell off of.

The Alley was home. It always will be. The finest sonuvabitches I ever knew lived there.

Submariner's Girl by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

This one is a personal thank you to a very special person. A sort of long overdue acknowledgement of how special the memories are that she so unselfishly gave to me, so many years ago. She said recently,

"I always thought of myself as a submariner's girl. It's nice to know I really was."

You betcha.

There was never a qual card for qualifying as a submariner's girl but if there had been, Susan Elisabeth you would have made it hands down.

Where do I begin. She was my high school squeeze... Fresh, wholesome, adventurous, devilish... 100% red-blooded American girl... And could wear you out chasing the tail of her comet.

When Sue was your love, you got a bonus... A kind of surprise package deal... You got her lovely mother, Grace. Anyone who didn't fall in love with Grace was past salvage. She set a table with home cooking that could draw a fellow away from a tie ball game in the ninth inning. I loved Grace and for reasons never fully understood, Grace loved me. I still have her Cheese Grits recipe, so I still have breakfast with Grace. She's in Heaven... Most likely, feeding stray bluejackets who show up on her doorstep, great chow and telling them when Sue arrives they better hit the supply officer up for fresh batteries for their pacemakers (Main power electricians will probably be dragging around one of those one ton MLA 77A Exide wet lead acid monsters on a solid gold hand truck).

Most girls dropped you like a hot potato when you got to Great Lakes, and didn't write. 'A' School and New London didn't improve your love letter production a helluva lot either. Susan Elisabeth never failed you.

At submarine school, we studied the Becuna (SS-319). It was nice to escape from all that gahdam trim and drain... IMO pump pressure ratio to the hydraulic accumulator bullshit... And read the words "I miss you so very much"... And catch five minutes of daydreaming about magic moments in a '57 Olds... Where a lovely girl allowed intimate moments beyond bra hooks... And made you forget about everything but her, the stars and lightning bugs. There is something wonderful about unasked for... Wholly voluntary hugs and the gift of soft lips... Softest lips ever.

The letters came. I had a lower rack in Barracks 142... Definitely not the penthouse at the Waldorf Astoria but everything looks the same when they turn off the lights.

"Hey, firewatch!"

"Whatcha want, Armstrong?"

"Let me borrow your flashlight."

"What for?"

"Wanna look at my girl's picture. Beginning to forget what real good looking women look like... Need a refresher... Kind of a wet dream booster shot."

"Get outta here... Jeezus Armstrong, you keep it up and the medics are going to be sprinkling wierd stuff in your chow."

"Gimme yur gahdam light... You wanna see one helluva good looking girl?"

She was. That may be an understatement.

Boat service could be a lonely business. Oh sure, there was a lot of superficial sex... One nighters... Commercial conveyor belt sheep dip. Commonly known as "That'll be twenty-five, here's your white hat" sex. Not the same as being loved. Knowing someone, somewhere truly missed you and was waiting someplace on the other side of the pressure hull, to wrap her arms around you... You can't buy that.

When I got in and the lines were doubled up and we shoved the brow over so some lard-ass mail clerk off 'Mother Onion' could drag a couple of worn out, postal-reject mail bags over so the chief could pass out mail and make wise-ass remarks about paternity subpoenas and missed car payment notices. It was great to get an envelope with beautiful handwritten addressing... And an imprint in lipstick. You smiled the wise, all-knowing 'I just robbed the cookie jar' smile and shoved the envelope in your dungaree pocket.

You didn't read it right away. It was like fine French wine... To be savored slowly and enjoyed at leisure. (How the hell did I become an authority on fine French wine? Sly Fox wasn't French... Hell, I'm not sure it was even wine... More like turpentine-based roach extermination fluid.)

So after the liberty sections went over the side, I would find a dry spot next to a well-ventilated section of pressure hull forward of the escape trunk where the impulse air flasks didn't impede air flow from the limber holes, and enjoy my letter. Forty years later, that may not appear to be a big deal to folks who never existed on bad air, chewable coffee and love letters for long periods of time.

If you could wangle a seventy-two, scare up a clean set of whites and fifty bucks, you could hitchhike home and wrap your arms around your deep saltwater fantasy and with luck, be able to field test the latest in lingerie fastenings... And hope that lovely Susan Elisabeth didn't catch a high heel in the electrical spaghetti wire under the dashboard of the old man's car.

"Jeezus Christ son... What in the hell did you do to the gahdam car last night? Damn seat adjustment is out... Power windows won't work and the lighter won't light... What the hell happened?"

I knew instantly he didn't want to hear the truth. Sue's high heels got tangled in the wire under the dash. Once your dad finds cotton undies under the front seat, you don't want to visit that subject ever again, on purpose.

"Dick Marshall's dog jumped in the car."

Dick Marshall didn't own a dog... Had to remember to tell him he owned an imaginary dog that screwed up the wiring in the old man's car.

First love is freely given... No expectations other than full commitment... Life is new... Still has the original cellophane intact. The cynicism that comes with maturity isn't there. You have suffered no disillusion, no skepticism, no hurts, no major disappointments... they are in the future. At nineteen and twenty, you own the world and can operate out of a diesel boat side locker and a bunk bag. You can also take your trusty electrician's knife and pry out a couple of pop rivets in the side locker frame just enough to create a slot big enough to wedge a picture of Susan Elisabeth in, to focus your dreams.

Somewhere, sometime, somehow we lost it... Lost what we had... Lost each other. We cashed in our dreams for the reality of life and grew up... We cheated ourselves.

Yes, Susan Elisabeth, you were a submariner's girl... The best. You spent a lot of time at sea, wedged in a side locker frame.

Being a Dead Broke E-3 by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

One time in East Tennessee, a fellow was talking about being 'dead broke'. I was about eight and had no idea what being dead broke meant.

"What's being dead broke mean?"

"Ain't got no money. If a man came down this here street yellin' 'I'm sellin' bonded whiskey for ten cents a gallon...' all I could do is yell, 'Damn, that's cheap!'"

You don't get any broker than that... That's rock-bottom busted.

At somewhere around \$150 a month base, sea, foreign duty, and sub pay rolled in, a red-blooded American bluejacket could achieve 'dead broke' status without a whole lot of effort. Beer at Bells and dining on Beer Nuts and Slim Jims regularly could put a sizable dent in your personal finances in one helluva hurry. Tom Clancy missed that in his books... Tom Clancy never missed the opportunity to buy bonded whiskey at ten cents a gallon because all he could come up with was pocket lint.

You eventually learn to innovate. An E-3 (SS) learned the 'between paydays survival skills'... It was either that or become a celibate, tee-totalling mystic. There were none on Requin.

One weekend, Stuke and I were shifting pocket lint back and forth when we came up with a great master plan.

We signed up for the beat-up, wired together car that was co-owned by every non-rated idiot in the after battery. We scraped together close to twenty bucks, hit up the slush fund, some poor bastard who had fallen behind in quals and was restricted, and an old Chief who was sitting around waiting for some sonuvabitch to invent Viagra.

We poked four cans of beans in our foul weather jacket pockets and wangled a one pound can of wierd coffee from a wardroom steward... Had stuff called chickory in it... Folks in Louisiana like it. Folks in Louisiana would drink boiled alligator bile and like it. You could boil a lumberjack's jock and get a better cup of something to drink... But a dead-broke E-3 will drink damn near anything.

We were too stupid to grab a couple of spoons... Forks... Stuff a birdbrain would recognize would be required to convey food from can to mouth... Tools God rarely delivered from the clouds. We did take some blankets from the alley... Blankets that in their entire naval careers had never seen fresh air, sunshine or any form of sanitizing agent. These were the days before moonbeam propulsion, when enlisted men at the lower end of the submarine power grid lived like migratory lettuce pickers and had blankets that had been left over from Hindu funerals. Always visualized nuke guys wrapping themselves in down comforters and being tucked in by the below decks watch.

We were clever enough to misappropriate two clean Pyrex cups from the rack over the messcook's deep sink... You remember... The one with the heating element on the rinse side... The one that by the third seating, had water roaming around in it just under two million degrees that gave you boiled lobster fingers and fogged up your wristwatch.

Tom Clancy has a Rolex... He never owned a fogged up Timex.

We put five bucks worth of gas in the duty rattletrap and stopped to buy a cheap three buck coffee pot. For five bucks in those days, at 29 cents a gallon you could drive to the beach in North Carolina and back, and still have enough left over to cruise Virginia Beach and 'check your traps'... Nobody ever heard of an OPEC oil minister and they were still pumping oil out of the ground in Texas. Once the Arabians discovered Rolex watches, things went to hell and we got into big time fanny kissing in the land of sand and camels.

The coffee pot... This was a major purchase for two defenders of peace, freedom and the projection of naval power in the North Atlantic. Stuke bought the damn thing. At three bucks, you got a contraption made out of aluminum that was one grade higher than aluminum foil... Dent-prone and lighter than a pillow feather. Any homemaker would have recognized our pot was a total piece of crap at fifty feet.

We drove to a stretch of deserted beach south of Kitty Hawk. Just sand... Miles of sand-anchoring snow fence and a sign reading 'NO OPEN FIRES... NO ALCOHOL... USE PUBLIC RESTROOMS'. We couldn't understand the prohibition of peeing on the beach since every naval ship heading into Norfolk blew poop tanks off Hattaras on the way in. Being in possession of that knowledge made us figure if we took a couple of wizzes during the night, the state of North Carolina would have a rough time sorting out our contribution from what was floating up from a passing carrier or a couple of cans. When you are stupid, you figure out stuff like that. You would be amazed how the qualified E-3 mind works.

We also figured if we ripped a couple of dozen slats out of the dune fence and built a fire... It would probably be an 'open' fire... We never did figure out how to distinguish an 'open' fire from a 'closed' fire. We didn't go to Annapolis and nobody at New London covered obviously allowed 'closed' fires. So, we figured if we lit a fire, with our luck it would be the wrong kind and the two of us would wind up on a North Carolina road gang and miss the third class exam.

So we opened a can of beans and heated it up over a couple of railroad flares we found in the trunk, using a pair of needle-nose pliers for a handle. And since we didn't understand the physics of proper coffee pot percolation, we tossed away the guts of the pot and threw in generous handfuls of Louisiana horse manure blend coffee, and attempted to boil it up on the engine block of the four-wheeled mechanical wonder car.

What we ended up with was a lukewarm brew that could float a lugnut and tasted like something you'd find snorkeling around in a Pakistani bus station toilet. In the annals of lousy coffee, that little 'wardroom delicacy' ranked up there with the absolute worst ever invented.

We rolled out our blankets, zipped up our foul weather jackets and spent the entire night discovering why folks didn't go to the beach in the wintertime. Sometime during the night, one of the gentlemen who was unknowingly making what would later be known as a substantial contribution to the winning of the Cold War, went to take an unauthorized pee and stepped on the coffee pot.

The following morning found the two bulwarks against Russian domination of the sea lanes, doing their damndest to reshape bent aluminum into something that would allow them to heat up another load of something remotely resembling coffee... This was complicated by having to keep damn near frozen fingers in jacket pockets to ward off eminent frostbite and keep ice from forming in the blood stream. We also noted that the dye in the bandana we had been using to strain out coffee grounds as we poured the Louisiana hog plasma into the cups, was considerably reduced to zip at the point used in the straining process. We amused ourselves discussing the culinary possibilities of railroad flare cookery.

Standing there, dew-soaked drinking coffee... Or something half-warm and liquid... Rolling up soggy blankets, we took stock of the positive side. When had two goofy diesel boat sailors gone to the beach for twenty bucks, not had to put up with mosquitoes, avoided big-busted girls with tight fannies running around in scanty bikinis, pioneered cooking techniques, done a lot of illegal peeing and gotten away with it, and proven that they weren't candy-asses in Arleigh Burke's navy?

A smoke boat sailor could do more dead broke than a surface craft whiner could do two days after pay call.

One hundred fifty a month, bad air, shared bunks... Hand-me-down foul weather gear... Worn out boats... Geezer Chief petty officers... Lousy mid-rats and the company of some of the finest men that ever lived. Oh, to be nineteen again.

The Silver Plated Coffee Pot by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Officers ate forward... The animals chowed down aft... It was always like that.

The wardroom was a picture of decorum... Civility... Cloth napkins... China with little blue anchors on the rim... Nice silver and a silver plated coffee service. Nobody put their elbows on the table... Conversation was low-key, polite and intellectual on multiple levels. Emily Post would have felt right at home.

It wasn't like that aft.

We ate off Pyrex plates, using stainless utensils that had been bent all to hell opening crates, boxes and varnish cans. We sat on padded potato lockers and didn't give a damn where you put your elbows. As long as you didn't park your boots in the mashed potatoes, you were okay. Nothing was off-limits when it came to table conversation... It was usually informative, disgusting and would have shut down a Sunday school picnic. Farmers talked about lancing bovine boils... Guys coming off liberty would expound on car wreck carnage... Old veterans would go into great detail about stuff they had picked up from wayward damsels in faraway places. Ghangis Khan and Ivan the Terrible would have been right at home. Emily Post would have had a heart attack.

Nobody understood the concept of civility.

"Hey Mike, toss me a couple of gahdam biscuits."

"You want butter?"

"Yeah, slide it down."

"Jeezus Christ Dex, how many pork chops you think you can get on that plate? You forget you have shipmates?"

"Look who's talkin'. I seem to remember last night, you took enough meatloaf to fill the forward hold on Mother Onion."

"Hey Jack, you gonna hog the spuds all night?"

"Pass the damn beans."

And so it went. Red-blooded American bluejackets miles from the civilizing influence of the gentle sex. Who, when left on their own, reverted to the primitive ways of their Viking ancestors.

One thing smoke boat boys never forgot. We had the best mashed potatoes anyone ever turned out. The Army and Marines might put up with spuds out of a box... Powdered crap... But not the smoke boat service. We always had real live, peel 'em spuds. The messcooks peeled 'em during movies... It was the only way a non-qual ever got to watch a movie... And if the lads were in a good mood, you could pass out peelers and have a mass peeling session along with your shoot 'em up.

They served mountains of them... Butter and great mashed potatoes.

We didn't have a magic, Alladin's lamp silver plated coffee pot. We had a contraption called a coffee urn... Something akin to a pigmy water heater with a glass sight gauge that told you the closer you got to the bottom, the closer you got to roofing tar... From roofing tar, you went directly to 'bottom of the pot asphalt'. You could stand a spoon up in after battery coffee.

The urn had a gravity drain that connected it directly to #2 sanitary tank wherein resided crew poop and rapidly decomposing head paper. The line had a small gate valve and a couple of kick throws... Failure to secure these little rascals before opening 225 lb. discharge air, allowed the charming contents of #2 to back up into the urn. Maxwell House and percolated doo doo make for one helluva cup of coffee... One of those fringe benefits of diesel boat submarining that Tom Clancy never shared with the lads he writes about.

Submarines carry folks called quartermasters... Guys who dabble in occult sciences remotely related to establishing a ship's position as related to God knows what. These are men who worship at the alter of the LORAN god and who couldn't find their ass with both hands and a flashlight. Guys whose entire vocabulary consists of,

"Anyone got a clean white hat? Me and the skipper are going up on the tender."

But they had one thing on the rest of the animals... They got to drink coffee poured from the silver plated coffee pot forward... The marvelous device not connected to anything from which it could receive surprise gifts.

Quartermasters were sometimes invited to officer pow-wows and secret handshake meetings... I was an E-3 and had no idea what they did other than drink coffee and spend a lot of time trying to figure out where we were. We had a piece of equipment called a LORAN... A device that was about as reliable as a cinder block when it came to determining our position. The only difference between our LORAN and a Hindu tea leaf reader was that the LORAN didn't steal oxygen.

The quartermasters and the officers used to study the charts... Drink chicken blood... Throw bones in the air and communicate with unseen spirits and something called the Naval Almanac... The stars... Wind direction... Earth rotation... Aunt Jamima... Jeezus... and use words like,

"We should be somewhere right about here..."

Hell, we should have been drinkin' at Bells.

It had to be something that came out of that silver plated coffee pot, because we always managed to find the international buoy... The Chesapeake Lightship and the light on top of the Cavalier Hotel at Virginia Beach... And once you could see that you knew you were only a couple of hours until you would be seeing that world-wide universal navigation beacon... A neon sign that read,

'BELLS BAR and NAVAL TAILORS'

And the old faded cardboard sign in the window...

'Let BELLS put you in a new set of blues - Only \$29.95 - Credit available - Just ask'

How many of you still had your ass mortgaged to Bells two years after you tossed those Bells 'nut-huggin' blues in the lucky bag?

On the old 481, navigation was less of a science and more of a community crap shoot, but somehow or another, we managed to find our way there and back... Had to be that damn silver plated coffee pot.

If someone ever gives you a choice between a quartermaster and a seeing eye dog, do yourself a favor... Stock up on dog biscuits and learn rudimentary bark.

Old Gringo's Special Blend Coffee by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

"Fit for the Forward Engine House"

Collect the following:

- 1 Dog collar from Marine Corps mascot.
- 1 Dr. Scholls 'Odor Eater' from an old Pakistani sandal.
- 1 Welcome mat from Motel 6.
- 1 Half-rotten bota bag goatskin found under bull ring bleachers in Spanish village prior to 1955.

- 1 Of Hillary Clinton's discarded sneakers.
- 3 Sanitized tablets from officers urinal... Stuff once known as 'wardroom candy' found in forward torpedo room head.
- 1 Dead pier rat, any sub base.
- 1 Old Yugoslavian baby diaper.
- 1 Of Olga Korbut's gym shorts.
- Total contents of Honduran spittoon.
- 1 Used Fram oil filter.
- 1 Tablespoon of horse laxative.
- 2 Socks out of COB's laundry bag.
- 1 Dead owl.
- 2 Of Janet Reno's deodorant pads.
- 1/2 Pound dried skunk jerky. -
- 1 Greyhound bus seat cushion.
- 1 Texaco toilet seat hinge.
- 1 Burmese Plumber's Helper.
- 1 Photo of Hyman Rickover.
- 2 Neckties from South American leper colony (Or 2 neckties from Ray Stone's wardrobe works just as well).
- 1 Left hind leg of a moderate size iguana.
- 4 Screws from men's room floor drain in Bells Bar.

Toss in wiped out paint can, boil and strain through surface craft JG's dress canvas hat or barmaid's panty hose and serve in dirty coffee cup. If you get complaints about something missing, reintroduce rat bones. When a Machinist Mate smiles and shouts,

"They don't make donkey doo-doo like this anymore..."

You got it right.

This is 'Old Gringo's Special Blend' (Not sold in stores). He wanted to share this with the lads who never sucked diesel exhaust and slept in their underway boots. He thought twinkle boat coffee might be thinning out a little.

Before the Psychic Network, Quartermasters

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Every boat had a couple. Why? I'm not quite sure. I understand that today nukes just phone '1-900-WHERE-THE-HELL-AM-I'.

Stuke became a quartermaster. It was a good choice since the two of us had spent most of our submarine careers wondering where we were and what'n the hell we were doing... Not that it bothered us much... Somehow the Old Man always got us back to Pier 22 where Stuke and I could crawl from there to Bells blindfolded.

The crew became extremely concerned when Stuke decided to strike for quartermaster. Everyone kinda figured we'd start running into stuff and missing a lot of good liberty because we wouldn't be able to find where we were slated to tie up. The Chief said,

"Don't worry, if the place has two bars and a whorehouse, Stuke can find it in the dark."

That was reassuring... Every place Requin ever went had at least two bars and a whorehouse... And a great cathouse to convent ratio, to boot.

The tender had all the charts. The clowns appointed as the Keepers of the Charts took their work very seriously... It was as if they were sitting on the Dead Sea Scrolls or stuff actually handwritten by Jesus.

The Old Man would send some E-3 duty gofer to 'chop-chop' up to 'Mother Onion' to pick up charts and the latest Notice to Mariners. You'd get up there and find that the Eunuchs of the Chart Harem had pulled them and wanted you to walk across a bed of red-hot bayonets, jump through the firey hoop, drink the rooster blood, and sign a mortgage on your first-born child. The sonuvabitches had more logs and authorizations that required signatures than you had to deal with for a car loan.

'Quartermaster' is not a rating... It is a cult. A society of strange individuals who practice highly refined mumbo-jumbo at a level only fully understood by God and Annapolis graduates. They worship at the temple of the LORAN god... LORAN is East Timorese for 'I got no idea where I am'... All you have to know to be a QM is the adjective, 'about'.

"We are about here... At 2300 we should be about there. The way I calculate things sir, we'll intercept her about at this point."

'About' was one of the best cover your ass words ever invented. If your voo-doo proved correct, you were a hero... If not,

"Sir, I never intended to imply an exact position... Only 'about' where it would be... Proximity sir, relative proximity. Portsmouth, England and Christchurch, New Zealand are very near each other if you consider the totality of the universe."

With Quartermasters, you can order bullshit in the flavor of the month.

Never tell them that since they were wardroom organ grinder monkeys, they should wear little red suits with shiny brass buttons and carry a tin cup.

There used to be a tourist trap franchise called 'Stuckey's (not to be confused with Stuke, as in Adrian). Stuckey's sold post cards, pecan logs and stale cigarettes at prices only happy people on vacation would pay. Every major highway in the south had them... To be considered a major southern highway, you had to have the following... (A) At least two zones where vehicles were required to go from 60 MPH to 15 MPH in fifty yards... Sometimes legitimized by a sign reading 'BLIND CHILD'... Sometimes known as North Georgia blind child revenue enhancing speed trap for out-of-state licensed vehicles. (B) Two barbeque joints with hand-painted misspelled signs (I think I loused up 'misspelled'... It might have one less 'S'). (C) A Texaco station with restrooms so bad a decent woman would pee in her pants before she would use one. (D) At least six giant concrete crosses with 'HE IS COMING AGAIN' on one side and 'JESUS SAVES' on the other. And (E) Five or more Stuckey's joints with signs nailed on trees and every other vertical surface for twenty miles, telling you how many more miles it was to the next Stuckey's.

One night, the gyro went nuts... LORAN crapped out and it was overcast. The Old Man was in the conn and yelled down,

"Can anyone give me a fix on something? Gahdammit, just where in the hell are we?"

And Stuke yells,

"Stuckey's, ten miles... We can pick up a pecan log and a roadmap."

This is enlisted humor... Not to be confused with officer's humor, usually based on golf jokes or funny stuff that falls out of polo ponies.

To fully appreciate the great skill required in quartermastering, you only have to see one very drunk quartermaster making pen and ink chart corrections. It is called the 'What the hell, that's close enough' school of accurate data entry. Stuke pioneered a lot of the methodology.

"Hey Dex, what's the chance this frigging thing will go to port Diddledick, South Africa before our enlistments run out?"

"Not much, why?"

"Cause they got a lot of wierd shit floating around there... Derelict ships... Loose channel markers... You name it and it's floating around down there."

"So what?"

"Well, if we're not going there why waste time marking up the chart?"

"Fold the damn thing up and I'll stick it up under my dungaree shirt and file it in the chart locker standing on the pier disguised as a dumpster."

Stuke let me in on one of the closest held secrets of the Holy Order of the Quartermastering Pathfinders of the Ocean...

"If you are in the North Atlantic and you go directly west, you will hit something where people there will speak your language and tell you where you are. Head east and you will hit something that probably won't speak your language and has no idea where it is... Head west."

The Big Picture was Never in Focus

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Me'n Stuke worked for Arliegh Burke. We had no gahdam idea what middle management between the skipper and "31 knot" Burke looked like or did for a living.. And frankly, didn't give a damn. Admiral Burke was a bluejackets' leader. He was a meat eater... Absolute King of the Jungle. He was an action man in a world of 'All talk, no do'. Burke was the kind of individual who would hunt Bengal Tigers with a 22 and drag the dead ones home. No shark would ever eat Arliegh Burke out of reciprocal professional courtesy. Every mother in America could have no finer wish for a son, than wishing he would grow up to be just like Admiral Burke. The heart of a lion packaged in a kind gentleman who understood leadership from 'A' to 'Z'. As far as we were concerned, the squadron staff on Orion were shore duty personnel... 9 to 5 useless overhead. Outside of constantly losing our pay records and hauling us up to sick bay and poking hypodermic needles in our butts, they never seemed to be doing a whole helluva lot that contributed to the 'Big Picture'.

Officers talked a lot about 'Big Picture' stuff... I think they dabbled in it on a kind of 'Nibble around the edges' basis. If there actually was a big picture, it never reached Hogan's Alley on Requin, that's for damn sure.

Speaking of big pictures, in 1959 if some clown had come down Pier 22 with a forty-foot high photograph of the squadron commander on a sixty-foot pole, every E-3 topside would have said,

"Who'n the hell is that?"

If he turned up on *'What's my Line'* and we could have won two weeks at The Waldorf-Astoria with the Playmate of the Month, we would have still been stumped.

We knew he existed because several times a day some pea brain on Mother Onion blew a damn bos'un's pipe and announced to a world that could have cared less,

"Subron Six arriving..."

But as far as we were concerned, he lived in the same nether world with the Tooth Fairy, Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny, and other folks we had never met or seen.

We saw the Atlantic Sub Force Commander, Vice Admiral Elton W. Grenfell... He was a good egg. I don't have any idea what he did for a living other than sit around in a room jam-packed with four-strippers and think up weird stuff for submarines to do.

One time he came aboard. We knew he was a big cheese because the COB underwent a fast pop religious conversion and had us take down all the nekkit lady pictures, including the really great one of Janet Pilgrim in a lace nightie taped to inside of the after battery head stall door. An admiral wearing three stars could have had a mammoth attack of the green apple quick step and still there was no way in hell he would have gone in there. Didn't matter, the COB always won. We spent half the damn night turning to converting our clubhouse for seagoing idiots into the best imitation of a Sunday school we could come up with... And for the rest of my enlistment, whenever I was parked on the aft head in the after battery, I stared at the little pieces of tape that outlined where Janet and those 44 DDs peeked through that flimsy white nightie had been, and cussed Sublant.

The Admiral came. He had porked up a little since he tied knots in Tojo's tail and he had a sizeable pack of staff toadies nipping at his heels. They formed us up in dress canvas, including mess cooks. The standard drill, two ranks of stationary seagull crap targets aft of the sail. The Admiral gave us the mandatory 'You men are doing one helluva job for The U.S. Navy' speech... The one where the duty messcook always has that 'What in the hell is he talking about?' look on his face.

"Yes sir gentlemen... Wish I could fill you in on the big picture and you would understand how vital your individual contribution is."

Always big picture bullshit... It always came by one-ton loads. After the speech, the Admiral came down each row of bluejackets and spoke personally to each one of us. He didn't have to do that, but he did. You can't help liking an old smokeboat bastard who makes you feel like he really wants to shake your hand and say something to you.

He asked me if there was anything I would like to ask him.

"Yes sir... Is there any way you could work it so the geedunk truck would take Canadian money?"

He looked at me like I had three heads and a tail and moved on. The COB looked at me like I was a total idiot.

Here was my idea... At some time or another, every ship based in Norfolk put into Halifax. When it shoved off, the bunk locker drawers were loaded with left over Canadian money roaming around in them. Canadian money in '59 had a par value greater than U.S. money. In sizable amounts, the difference could add up. If the roach coach took Canadian money, it would substantially increase sales because it would be the only place thousands of bluejackets could dump the stuff. The navy mobile canteen folks would get a boatload of it and make out like Chinese bandits on large amount exchanges.

But if an E-3 thinks it up it's gotta be stupid... Not 'big picture'.

After we broke quarters, the COB came over shook his head and said,

"Next time the admiral shows up, I'm locking you in the paint locker."

I'm not sure that at nineteen the big picture matters much. Political alliances change... National identities change... Enemies come and go. You figure all that out much later in life. 'Big pictures' never remain the same... Maybe they are not really 'big pictures' at all, just snapshots of moments in time.

At nineteen, the Russians were the bad guys. All targets were designated Ivan...They rode boats hauling ordinance destined to be parked in your backyard. They were vermin and you were the Orkin man. A boatload of Russian boat sailors flooded at 350' was a cause for celebration. That was that much less ordinance available for package delivery.

Recent events make clear that somewhere between nineteen and sixty the big picture got refocused and things changed. But we were young... Didn't have time for anything resembling the big picture. Beer was a buck a pitcher at Bells... Slim Jims were a dime and on a lonely night if you were lucky, a barmaid would take you home for a hot shower and a late breakfast.

'31 knot Burke' could shuffle around the big picture and we had complete faith in him.

If Grenfell ever showed up again, I had some other ideas to bounce off him like moving the damn dumpsters on the pier closer to the nest, robotic chipping hammers and paint scrapers, and putting a couple of gals on the boats as Backscratchers Mates.

Women on submarines. At nineteen... Single... And a long way from home... Not a bad idea.

The Norfolk Gospel Tabernacle Bus

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

It was 2AM in the morning and there you were leaning on a parking meter, half in-the-bag with a missing white hat... Your jumper pocket hanging inside out with nothing in your wallet but a faded love letter, looking like a first-grader with a 'KICK ME' sign taped to your butt. Your running mate was sitting on the curb shuffling pocket lint and mumbling something in an unknown tongue about the possibility of the reappearance of 15 Slim-Jims and two gallons of draft beer.

It was late... It was dark and morning quarters was still six hours away.

At this point, a little teenage girl would appear and invite you to an all-night soul saving of wayward naval personnel and lead you... With the Good Book in hand, to the Norfolk Gospel Tabernacle Bus, known throughout DES/SUB Piers as the 'Free ride Jesus wagon.'

If you declined the invitation, the sweet little girl would poke what looked like a folded ten dollar bill in your jumper pocket... When you unfolded it, it was only half of a printed ten dollar bill... The other half read... "Satan also deceives... But Jesus saves". The things were great to leave on the chart table in the control room to hook some unsuspecting idiot.

But if you were an E-3 seriously considering crawling down Granby Street and Hampton Boulevard on your hands and knees, the alternative looked pretty damn good.

"C'mon Stuke...let's get on the bus."

"I dunno... Whatcha say we finda bar... Shumbodys gotta be open dis time-a night..."

"We're broke Kemosabi... Flat-ass outta wampum... No dinero. Gotta git back ta the boat."

"Boat?"

"Boat, you blind, drunk sonuvabitch... The gahdam boat... Gotta make quarters."

"You got a quarter?"

"No you idiot... Quarters... Morning muster. If you're gonna shoot your cookies, launch 'em in the street... Not on the bus."

"Bus... What bus? We gonna git onna bus? Where we goin'?"

"Lemme help you... Jeezus you look bent up."

"I look bent up? I feel tore up. Where's Jack?"

"Jack who?"

You ended up in an old former school bus with twenty or thirty other rollicking defenders of the free world. When the *fishers of lost souls* had harvested a bus-load, they fired up the engine and hauled you to a field so far out of Norfolk that land sold for a dime an acre.

In the middle of the field in this godforsaken corner of the planet, stood a tent... A big canvas circus tent. A tent wherein sat a couple of hundred drunken bluejackets parked on steel folding chairs swatting three pound mosquitoes and singing,

"What a friend we have in Jesus".

They unloaded and ran you through a kinda car wash sheep-dip process where a lady the size of a cement mixer gave you a cup of coffee that could float a lug nut. I have no idea what they put in that coffee but it could reverse the effect of embalming fluid. One cup and it was like somebody opened up an umbrella between your ears. Wow!!

All the lads who worked the Jesus tent wore coats and ties. Ties like your eighty-year-old granny gave you for Christmas. The girls were all flat-chested. In Norfolk it was impossible to be a religious zealot and have big tits, all at the same time.

Every thirty minutes or so, this guy, the Right Reverend Pringle of The Norfolk Mission to Redeem the Lost... Would pop up like a jack-in-the box and give you a run-down on what was going on in Hell... Sounded a lot like he'd once been billeted in T-division on the Orion.

You sang a few more songs, drank a little more coffee... Scraped the fur off the inside of your eyelids... Either accepted Jesus as your savior or smiled and said,

"Maybe next time, darlin,"

You reboarded the bus and got delivered to the pier. Hyman Rickover would have found the whole process absolutely disgusting... Unless he was drunk and dead-busted hanging onto a parking meter on Grandby Street at 2AM. Then he would have called it 'innovative alternative transportation.'

Mike Hemming had a reserved seat on the bus. The girls always used to say,

"Don't sit in that seat... Mr. Hemming should be here any minute... He's a regular... Been saved forty-two times."

None of it lasted more than the trip to Pier 22. Nobody who ever worked on a Fairbanks-Morse engine will be allowed in heaven... It's in the Bible... Book of Leroy... Chapter six... Verse nine.

Nobody Told Me by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Gentlemen, do you remember how pretty and peaceful the ocean looked on some sunny days when seagulls circled overhead gliding around under big puffy clouds? Remember swim call, 'Russian acrobat drill'? The boat would be 'layin' to' and the Old Man would announce swim call with no diving from the top of the sail. Remember how we rigged out the bow planes and would dive off the bull nose? We would do big cannonballs and blow depth charge holes with a big splash... Remember the guy on the sail with an M-1 rifle... The shark watch?

I just watched 'Shark Week' on the Discovery Channel. Boys and girls, we didn't know it at the time but there was a lot of nasty stuff out there swimming around outside the pressure hull... Great big nasty stuff that came with wicked teeth, was hungry and could eat you. They failed to mention that in the recruiting office and at New London. No one told me everytime I hopped off the bow, I was a Tennessee tacklebox lure for the really big ones. I thought sharks only ate Australians... And girls in bikinis swimming off New Zealand. Nobody said they ate seals. If they did, somebody stole that issue of National Geographic at my barber shop.

I never knew that there was stuff snorkeling around out there that could swallow a whole cow. I get duck bumps thinking about that now.

I thought Jaws was a science fiction movie... I didn't know that I spent years with his relatives poking around the outer door to our GDU.

Sharks are mean sonuvabitches. I saw one on T.V. chew chunks out of a bull carcass the size of snow tires and swallow them. Losing body parts that size could knock one hell of a dent in your liberty plans.

Scary... Scary thought. They just seem to swim around and eat other things swimming around out there. We were swimming around like Big Macs.

I kept waching them on T.V. and wondering... Did any mother get the following telegram...

'Dear Mrs. Murphy... We regret to inform you that a monster shark ate your son... Somewhere off Bermuda there is a large specimen of marine life containing major sections of Seaman John F. Murphy, messcook USS Requin (SS-481). His last words may be comforting...

"Tell mother I will miss her and most of my left leg"

Our condolences. The United States Navy.'

We had a shark watch marksman who couldn't have hit a billboard with a brick... But even if he had been Sgt. York, what in the hell would eight or ten rounds of 30 cal. ammunition have done to something with a six foot mouth, half the size of a school bus? With luck he could have turned it's dorsal fin into lace. By the time the clown with the M-1 got off his last round Mr. 'I just ate your two-way trash dumper' would have been picking his teeth with your dog tags.

The Printed Word by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The guys who rode the old boats will remember.

The literature... Make that, the reading material we had was rather basic. To put it another way... Nobody ever tripped over a Herman Melville novel or the collective works of Shelly or Keats going through the after battery, heading to his battle station. We read to fill time.

The chaplains passed out little pocket size New Testaments. Everybody had one. They only seemed to appear during 'rig for visitors' and the week before Easter and Christmas. I'm sure some lads read them regularly, but they didn't live in Hogans Alley.

We dealt in worthless, 'no literary merit' paperback trash. At sea, the official currency of the United States had little value. Horse trading took place in a barter system involving smokes... Razor blades and trash books.

Some guys were hooked on 'shoot-em-ups'... Westerns... Showdown at Laredo, Big Jake, The Running Gun, The Last Gunfighter... You name it... We had them all.

Most of us gravitated to titles like Swamp Woman, Boarding School Babes, Dream Doll, Dixie Darlings. There were two major publishers of this underground garbage... Fabian and Nightstand. These things got passed around until they fell apart.

Be honest, how many qualified men out there read books at sea knowing full well they would never see the last fifty pages? To this day, I have no idea how Harold Robbins' The Carperbaggers came out. Electricians standing watches on the sticks on a split-cubicle Tench boat would rip books in half so they could pass the part they had finished reading to their buddy so he could start reading the book while the other idiot was finishing the last half. Main power, diesel boat electricians lived a weird existence of which tandem reading was one of the strange things they did. Crawling around in the battery wells at sea was not conducive to rational behavior. The electrician rate was more of a goofy cult than a rate. Acid ate up thier dungarees faster than a two hundred pound moth. Poor ragged bastards lived on two part literature and incubating plausible rumors. They could dress up the damndest lies and peddle them to their unsuspecting, gullible shipmates in ten ton loads. The worst lie they ever handbuilt was a rumor the

boat was going to the Mardi Gras... They said they heard about it when they were listening to the secret wardroom conversation through the open battery well intakes in the forward battery. I bought it... And I wasn't alone. We had senior petty officers that got sucked in. Nobody on earth can lie with a straight face like an electrician. If Pinnocchio had been an electrician, he would have had a nose the length of the Norfolk Tunnel.

I remember one book that every idiot on Requin read. I have no idea what the title was, but it was about a Navy pilot who got shot down by the Japs and bailed out over some unknown South Sea island. When he landed in his parachute, he was captured and enslaved by two hundred sex-starved Amazons with insatiable appetites for all sorts of perverted lust and they were cursed with large bust development. In 1948, two Baptist missionaries and a company of Marines liberated the poor fellow... By that time he weighed fifteen pounds, was blind... Had been promoted to full commander and had six years back pay coming. Great book. A smokeboat best seller. Everyone figured if he had been a pig boat sailor, it would have taken six plastic surgeons more than a year to get the smile off his face.

We would have read anything just to fill the time after we qualified. Leaking chevron packing and condensate drips... Lousy movies and sea stories had their limitations when it came to bluejacket entertainment. The printed word became rather important.

After three or four weeks out, we found ourselves reading the labels on cans... The list of vitamins on the back of cereal boxes and the 'rig for dive' bills. You knew you were intellectually starved when you found yourself reading the drycleaning instructions sewn in your peacoat. If you rode the old 400 FT maximum depth, rock crusher-powered submersibles, you've been there.

One time, some officer forward gave one of the animals on board a copy of a big fat book called *The Rise And Fall of The Third Reich*. The Israelis had just cooked off Adolf Eichman and there was a lot of rekindled interest in the stuff that went on in Nazi Germany. It was a two or three-inch paperback. Guys who wanted to read it wrote their names in it. By the time I got to write my name in it, the inside cover was full and guys were signing up on the title page. The way it worked when the fellow above you finished it he gave it to you. When you had digested the monster you gave it to the lad whose name was below yours. My enlistment ran out before I got it. I guess the guy who was reading it, just drew a line through my name.

We rag airdales. That's the way it works. There is some kind of unwritten law that requires submariners to play 'pin the tail' on all aviator donkeys. I never understood why. I have a friend who was a World War II boatsailor personally decorated by Admiral Nimitz for risking his life to fish drowning flyers out of the Pacific. His name is Art Smith... A torpedoman who rode the USS Skate. Ray Stone introduced me to Art. Stone knows damn near everybody who rode the boats. The man dredges up old boat sailors like Dick Tracy.

I understood 'Tailhook'... In the words of Mike Hemming,

"It was like Bells Bar got hijacked to Las Vegas."

Aviators, God bless them, made the little Orphan Annie drops that brought love letters to stinking ratty submarine sailors poking holes in the North Atlantic. They would also put stuff in those mail drops simply because the bastards were good folks.

Newspapers... Time... Newsweek... Colliers... Readers Digest and if you were lucky, a Playboy magazine. They didn't have to do that, but they did. Hell, we didn't care if they couldn't hit a bull in the ass with a base fiddle... Any aircrew that made 'Annie Drops' to diesel boats were 'Top Gun' in our book, We didn't have poopie-grams or whatever in the hell they call them now... We had pilots and sneaky bastards called radiomen who could tuck secret stuff in officially allowed radio traffic.

Killjoy Hyman would have boiled smokeboat radiomen in oil. But then I don't think Rickover ever gave a damn about how New York made out against the Bears.

Subs contain minature societies... Little muninciple jurisdictions beneath the seas. Libraries of books stored in sidelockers and stacked in overhead vent lines... And you didn't need a library card. All you had to do was scare up a swap by yelling,

"Anybody wanna read *Goldilocks and The Gunners' Mate?*".

The Longest Night by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In everyone's life there are moments that are indelibly imprinted in a form that allows the event to be recalled in minute detail years later. The loss of Thresher was such an event.

I left the boat late that evening. I hung around waiting for some kid who was messcooking. I sat around in the crew's mess, bullshitting with the cooks and a couple of 'stay aboards' from the section pulling duty. Just cigarettes and coffee and aimless conversation to fill time. No real plans... Other than to fill another lonely empty evening with a few beers with mates and barmaids, eat some Slim Jims, wash 'em down with some suds and get a few whiffs of cheap perfume. Maybe have little Dixie sneak up behind me, lay those wonderful tits on my jumper flap and give me a kiss on the neck like she did in her devilishly playful moods.

Listen to a little Johnny Cash, *Big River* and *Ring of Fire*... Someone toss in a couple of quarters and punch up *La Bamba* and *The Lonely Bull*... Have Thelma yell at me to get my gahdam feet off the gahdam furniture, and head back before midnight.

When my messcooking running mate for the night finally got the dishes racked and tossed his apron to the cook, the 'stay aboards' were rewinding the nightly movie and the night baker was lining up the crap he needed to work his magic.

Topside watch yelled down the after battery hatch,

"Hey below!"

"Yo..."

"Just heard on the radio...Thresher's overdue."

"So what? You queer for some nuke on Thresher?"

"Gahdammit, they said she might be in trouble."

"Five'll get you ten they're full of it... Damn thing's brand new. Go take the slack out of your lines."

We didn't think much of it. In light of what happened that seems callous and uncaring now but at the time we truly thought nuke boats were invincible. The navy didn't lose submarines in peacetime. It was that simple.

The cook coming off duty... It may have been Custer or "Red" Wyatt, dropped us off at Bells.

We knew something was wrong when we got into Bells... No music... No customary racket... No clicking of pool balls. Just a bunch of Subron Six bluejackets in low conversation.

"Jeezus H. Christ... Everbody get a letter from home saying their dog died?"

"Knock it off Dex... Thresher's down."

"No shit?"

"No shit... Navy spokesman up at Portsmouth just said they've been unable to contact her for several hours... No UQC... Nothing since she reported she was buttoning up for a dive."

"Holy shit! the topside watch said he had picked something up like that but we didn't think it was possible... We kinda laughed him off."

"It's possible... In this case, a little more than possible."

"Poor bastards... I've got a buddy named Dick Hall riding her. Went to high school with him. Susan Elisabeth went through school with him."

Dick went to New London and cleared Basic Sub School in '58, a year before me. Got his ET crow (I'm sure he was an ET... But then again, it's been 40 years... Don't hold me to it.) and got sent to new construction. Thresher was his first and only boat. He may not have gotten his dolphins by the time she went down.

Somebody bummed a radio from an oriental seamstress in Bells' Naval Tailors and we plugged it in and sat it up on the bar. There was a landsale business going on in speculation as to what had happened, but the only things that were sure was that she had not been in a collision and that she had not been heard from.

At one point someone mentioned that a call had gone out for divers and ships' company of the Kittiwake, our submarine salvage vessel, to report to the ship. They also said something about the Sandpiper but we never heard anything more.

Bells was about as raunchy as boatsailor's bars came in those days. The possibility of it being listed as a four-star establishment in a Norfolk tourist guidebook were about as remote as Felix the Cat coming in first at the Kentucky Derby... But it became a cathedral the night Thresher was lost.

Barmaids were usually well-meaning sweet young things under 25, whose panties had passed their knees in various motor vehicles several hundred times before their 18th birthday... And at times, they were the closest thing to home a young bluejacket could find on a cold rainy night. Loved them then and still do.

On that night, they hurt right alongside of us. That night, I came to know that the most honest thing in life were barmaid's tears... That having a tiny corner in a tavern girl's heart was a very, very special thing and that holding a fallen angel when she needed a shoulder to soak up her sadness was a memory that I would revisit my whole life.

You would have to have been a twenty-two year old bluejacket a long way from home with tear-stained dolphins that night, to understand. It was a long night filled with the fear only boatsailors know and it didn't get any better the next morning.

I never had the honor of knowing the others but that night, the Creator took back a helluva fine lad...

Dick Hall.

Torpedo Recovery by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

If you weren't a Torpedoman, skip this one. You probably wouldn't understand most of it... Or give a rat's ass if you did. This is a sort of term paper for 'Olgoat' Stone. Proof

that even though it has been damn near forty years, I still remember. The funny thing about old submarine sailors... We remember. After all these years, I wouldn't hesitate for a second if somebody rounded up what's left of Frothingham's boys and told us to light off the old Fairbanks and single up.

When I first met Ray Stone, I did all the things required of members of the Torpedo Pusher Fraternity... I gave the secret handshake... Hopped around on one foot... Did the chicken dance and rooster strut... Barked at the moon and pissed against the wind. But then again, true torpedomen never stop testing each other. So here goes, Stone, you old stove-up, barnacle-laden sonuvabitch... Dex is about to pull a rabbit out of an old hydraulic, oil-soaked raghat.

Punching torpedoes out of submarines is a helluva way to make a living. In the old days, a damn torpedo was as heavy as a bridge girder and about half a block long. After you fired one of those practice rascals, you had to go find it and poke the damn thing back into your boat.

Finding them wasn't that hard... They painted the warheads a raucus orange. You could see them bobbing around a couple of thousand yards away... Looked like a damn snorkeling Mardi Gras float... Or one of Stone's ties.

But well before you hit the surface, the recovery drill began. The idiots in the forward room dropped the overhead racks called the bridal suite... The elevated pair of rat's nests that belonged exclusively to the stewards. Once you got them down and stowed, you dropped the collapsable frame that allowed access to the watertight torpedo loading hatch... You opened that when you heard the bow planes rigged in... That meant you were fully surfaced.

The deck force went topside and pulled the loading boom components out of their 'rig for sea' brackets in the superstructure, and rigged 'em. This could be a real pain-in-the-ass adventure if the boat was riding the swells and water was sloshing through the gahdam limber holes. It was like trying to assemble a tricycle in a washing machine.

While all this was going on, torpedomen went topside to fold back a section of deck whose underside was a wooden angled trough upon which a torpedo could be lowered to guide the damn thing into the room. Rigging the stupid thing was hell on fingers... Not that any of us planned a future as a concert pianist, but we figured all of what we had, made operating thirteen-button blues a lot easier than it would be if you left a couple of 'em snorkeling around in the North Atlantic.

A lot of very original cussing and swearing went on during a torpedo recovery. 'Dumb bastard' and 'Stupid sonuvabitch' were favorites, followed by 'Move your worthless ass', 'How many gahdam times do I have to tell you frigging idiots?', and 'If it was up your butt you'd know where it was...'

In the forward room, the monkeys were centering a skid and elevating it with chain falls to match the angle of the deck skid already in place. By this time, the clowns on the bridge had located the torpedo... 'Fish' to the initiated... It was usually bobbing around like a wallowing steel rhino.

The OD would lay the boat alongside and the beast would bounce off the saddle tanks making a sound like someone pounding the side of an empty oil truck with a twenty-pound sledgehammer.

By this time, the duty swimmer arrived topside and handed something known as a 'nose cap' to one of the two lads manning the snubbing lines that would be 'figure-eighted' to the skid cleats, to lower the fish onto the elevated skid in the forward room.

Any bastard who ever went over the side into the icy water of the North Atlantic, to wrestle a two-ton torpedo and get a belly band in place on one of the stupid sonuvabitches, will get a fifty-yard line, front row seat in hell. If there's such a thing as a peacetime hero, they are mine. If you are ever given a choice between putting silk stockings and a garter belt on a starved crocodile, or going over the side to slip a belly band on a Mark 14... Go for the croc.

So, the poor devil (who is now covered in petroleum jelly, thanks to the corpsman) hits the water... He gets the band in place and attaches the hoisting cable and fore and aft vang lines used to guide the damn thing and position it when the boom elevates it to deck level. The lads on the vang lines align the fish over the angled skid and the fellows on the boom lower it.

Once the nose cap and snubbing lines were in place to check the descent, the fish was returned to the skid in the forward room.

And that senior Stone, was what it looked like to an E-3 who couldn't find his ass with both hands and a flashlight on a dark night.

Will you now sign my qual card and buy me a Saint Pauli Girl? You big, ugly sonuvabitch...

It Was a Shining Time by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I can't imagine going to sea and never getting to bounce around in 'surface turbulence'. Just going out, going deep and staying there. Must get boring.

Loved it when the old girl got to kick up her heels in heavy weather... loved the roll and pitch of a round bottom smokeboat... Loved the creak and groan as she wallowed around in the swells. Loved the cussing of the lads who rode her as they tried to make their way fore and aft, getting slammed in all directions... Loved riding heavy seas. It made you feel great to be a sailor.

I think I would have loved riding cans except for the horseshit regulation of the surface craft Navy... That bosun pipe, uniform of the day and clean white hat crap.

Don't understand what nukes see in that coal mine life of just going down for a couple of months of cracker box living... Just out and down and then up and in again. How can you call that 'going to sea'? That 's gerbil cage life... No feeling a rolling deck... No salt spray in the face... No watching your plate do the North Atlantic waltz across the messtable... No shit falling out of the overhead... No sound of tons of water sloshing through the superstructure and no lying in your rack being rocked to sleep.

Wouldn't like riding an ocean-going giant elevator.

They say you don't miss what you never had which is one of the reasons I don't miss sex with Princess Diana. But riding a saltwater subway isn't my idea of a good thing. No damn diesel smoke... Jeezus, no damn any kind of smoke. What kind of submarine duty is it without looking aft and seeing that smoke?

No lookout duty... No laughing when you take one up the fairwater and over the bridge with the better part of a gallon of water running down the neck of your foulweather jacket and soaking your skivvies. No foulweather gear spread over Fairbanks covers to dry. No sea birds... Oh, you gotta have sea birds. Watching soaring seabirds was the extra bonus God gave young men who chose a life at sea.

No porpoise jumping in your bow wave... No watching bow bouyancy going over one and under one... No ships passing in the night... No late night signal light exchange of lighthearted bullshit... No high line transfers. What kind of life is it without all of that?

I think I know why the Navy invented the boomer pin. They wanted to compensate sailors for all of the good stuff they stole from the poor bastards.

"Here's a trinket for all the really good stuff you don't know you're missing."

They never sent me my Princess Diana pin.

I couldn't do it... I couldn't crawl into an iron monster and spend a couple of months watching lights, computer screens and my toenails grow.

Riding boats today must be like being a kid raised in a safe deposit box. What would it be like to be riding a boat that never came in with patches of missing paint... Decking gone... Line locker lids left somewhere on the ocean floor... Dished in limber holes and no stern light? No wild stories to tell over a couple of cold ones... No "Jeezus, you should have been out there with us" lies.

Gringo said it best... "It was a shining time."

It was.

Twenty-First Birthday by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I don't have birthdays... Never did. I was born the day after Christmas. As a kid, I went to other kids birthday parties but I never had one. My old man thought it was neat to split presents... One skate on the 25th, one skate the 26th... Boy Scout uniform shirt Christmas... Pants the next day. This is not funny... It's stupid. Most folks just give a kid one present with a card that reads 'Merry Christmas, Happy Birthday'. Kids born on the 26th are a great economic benefit to cheap relatives.

So my birthday passed unnoticed. That's the way it was until 1961... The best birthday I ever had.

We were out... I stood the 4 to 8 on the planes on the 25th, grabbed a leftover turkey roll sandwich in the messdeck, found an empty rack in the alley and crawled in. To be honest, I didn't even think about it being my birthday. Like the fact that you don't think about your speedometer rolling over each thousand miles, mine just rolled over and that's it.

So I am racked out, dead to the world and I feel somebody shaking me...

"Dex...Dex... Wake up and piss... The worlds on fire."

"Huh?"

"Roll out."

"Is it time to go on watch?"

"NO... Get your worthless, good for nuthin' butt outta the rack and come up to the crews mess."

"You shittin' me? What is this?"

So I rolled out... I slept in my dungarees and rarely took off my boots so I was wearing my party duds. I came into the bright light of the messdeck and all of my running mates were there. Rat Johnson was night baker and God bless him, he'd taken time to bake a cake. He stuck 21 Marlboros in it for candles. That silly looking lopsided cake was one of the most thoughtful things anyone had ever done.

There they were...The damndest collection of goofy looking, unshaven idiots ever assembled... A roster of men whose names and faces remain and will always remain indelibly imprinted in a grateful undeserving heart... The best I have ever known.

They had this human barricade formed beginning at the air manifold and ending at the coffee urn, so that if any officer came aft, he would have to move six to eight idiots to

clear the passage way. Why? Because John T. pulled a fifth of Hiram Walker Ten-High out of his dungaree shirt and poured me a damn coffee cup half full of it.

"Take your first legal drink, peckerhead."

And I did.

I don't want to offend anyone who has cultivated an appreciation for Ten-High whiskey, but you could save a hell of a lot of money just mixing low grade gasoline with weed killer. That would create a reasonable facsimile... 'Nasty shit' doesn't even begin to describe that stuff.

"Jeezus, John T... What'n the hell is this?"

"Grown man's whiskey, son... Puts hair on your chest."

John T. had hair on his chest. All over his back, shoulders, up his neck... All over his arms, on the back of his hands... All over his feet and toes, a thick black beard, and shoe brush-looking eyebrows. The damn stuff sure must have worked... The sonuvabitch could have passed for a gorilla.

What a great birthday. You only need one of those to last a lifetime. That's all you need... Every year you just haul it out of your heart, dust it off and enjoy the wonderful memory.

The Allowable Radius by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

We used to get liberty in increments of 48 and 72 hours. Each came with something called 'the allowable radius'... This translated to the distance, that some goofy bastard somewhere who set navy policy, thought a bluejacket operating on a migratory grape-picker's wages that Uncle Sam paid, could responsibly go and return from. We figured the sonuvabitch had never been nineteen and must have an anvil grafted to his leg.

An enterprising E-3 submarine sailor with proper planning, could go from Norfolk to the moon and back in 72 hours. We traveled light... You could toss enough gear in an A.W.O.L. bag to to survive an expedition to Mt. Everest. We could stretch a 72 to an operating radius that included multiple time zones. We put elasticity in an allowable radius that would have amazed the guy who wrote *Around The World in Eighty Days*.

Adrian Stuke could go from Norfolk to Quincy, Illinois and make morning quarters standing tall on a 72. He was the master... No one could expand the allowable radius like the 'Stookeyman'... He could cover real estate faster than the Indianapolis 500.

It was a time when six lads would pile into a car that looked like it wouldn't make it around the block and drive night and day... Driving in rotating shifts, eating rations

packed by on board cooks in on the conspiracy to violate the allowable radius policy, time after time.

A lot of what went on at the bottom end of the submarine social scale was based on 'us against the system'. Not because we had a smart-ass mindset... Not at all. We did it for the same reason the navy selected us in the first place. We were bright... We could work as a well-coordinated team to overcome obstacles and find ways to get the job done. We thought on our feet and looked at regulations as applying to the poor, dumb bastards who didn't own Dolphins... The sheep who rode surface craft, wore the uniform of the day and spent their lives being herded around by doofus idiots called 'Master at Arms'.

I am sure that there were competent MAAs, but in my short, bottle rocket naval career, I never met one. They were usually dull-witted oafs that had percolated up through the naval rate system and reached a point where longevity bounced up against the ability to do a decent job. Most of the dumb idiots couldn't tie their shoes on a dark night, so the navy gave them a badge and made them shipboard cops.

The best entertainment a qualified E-3 ever had was the game of putting stuff over on the tender MAAs. We made monkeys out of them on a regular basis. They hated us... We stole them blind... Not for personal gain but to keep the old smokeboats going.

The reason I mention these dimwits in conjunction with stretching a 72 is because one of the pea-brains once caught us crossing the Orion, hauling ten cans of Spam in a couple of AWOL bags... They were intended to cover us for a two-day trip to a North Carolina beach.

This porked-up monster caught us at the lower brow and inspected our AWOL bags... Found ten cans of Spam in those green navy issue cans.

"What do we have here?"

He was licking his chops like Brer Fox... Make that Brer Bear.

"Spam, chief... You have trouble reading the big words on the cans?"

"And what in the hell are we doing with it tucked in our bags, gentlemen?"

"We're hauling it over to the duty cook on the Redfin."

"In an AWOL bag?"

"Did you ever try to stuff ten cans of Spam in a couple of jumper pockets?"

"Well, gentlemen..."

('Gentlemen' was a smart-ass term the goofy bastards used when they thought they had a boat sailor by the short curlies...)

"Well gentlemen, let's take a little stroll over to the Redfin and see if they are expecting you."

Mr. Dick Tracy Chief Bosun' Doofus walked us over to the Redfin where we unloaded the Spam and apologized for the delay in delivery. The topside watch went aft and called down to the cook, who came topside having figured out that a couple of idiots were tap-dancing in some kind of doo-doo.

"Well, it's about gahdam time... Where have you two stupid bastards been? How many cans are there?"

"Ten."

"Thassa 'bout right... Who's your ugly friend?"

"MAA off the Orion."

"What can we do for you, chief?"

"Nothing... You call for this Spam?"

"Does a hobby horse have a hickory dick?"

The whole squadron was our briar patch.

If you worked the system wearing Dolphins, it was like you were bulletproof and there was always somebody out there to throw you a life jacket and toss you a line. And with ten bucks, a tank of cheap gas and a 72, you could stretch an allowable radius like a fat girl's garter belt.

And we did.

Adrian and Aqua Velva by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The 'Stookeyman' loves his music. Short of cutting out his tongue and pop riveting the idiots lips together there is no way you can stop him from 'singing his tunes'. They were and unfortunately, always will be his trademark.

Those of you who rode submersible craft that sucked sustenance through a fuel hose will remember the smell of Aqua Velva and the lunacy that broke out in the after battery two minutes after the Old Man announced that we were making turns for home.

For several weeks you had lived in a compartment constantly in red light because the ugly bastards that were your shipmates slept in rotating shifts. Meaning there were always sonuvabitches trying to sleep. Any idiot who was dumb enough to turn on 'white light' in a berthing compartment would be instantly greeted by wholesale obscenity, boots, shoes and the latest hardback selections of the 'Book of the Month.' You could actually die like the folks in the Bible did who got stoned to death. Or be maimed to the point you would have to be transferred to a Mexican minesweeper.

But when the skipper turned the old girl in the direction of Pier 22, the white light came on and the channel fever Mardi Gras began.

The place looked like a hobo village that had been carpet-bombed.

The Smithsonian has a submarine centennial exhibit that shows what life in the undersea navy was like. If they showed a re-creation of a diesel boat after battery compartment after six weeks on the snorkel, mothers would mercy kill their male offspring before they would allow the lads to sign up for the boat service.

A complete moron would have no problem figuring out the origin of the term 'pigboat'. Even a self-respecting zoo has guys who show up regularly to hose the doo-doo out of the cages. But what the hell, it was the life we loved and nesting in dirty laundry, sour towels and weird smelling flash pads came with the twin fish over your pocket and it was always the 'maids day off'.

So there we were, happier than clams, rooting through side lockers for soap... Toothbrushes, combs... A little Lucky Tiger hair tonic... A "little dab'll do ya" Brylcreme... Vitalis... You name it. Old Spice... Mennen's skin bracer... And that old boat sailor's stand-by, Aqua-Velva. The place smelled like the parlor in a New Orleans cathouse. Guys would line up for showers... No more water ration.

The showers on the old smokeboats were half the size of a Volkswagen glove box. You had to Crisco your ass to turn around in one of the damn things. Enginemen, like Mike Hemming used to use paint scrapers and Varsol to get down to where soap would do any good.

A good time was had by all.

Then it would happen...

The 'Stookeyman' would emerge from the shower, comb his hair, look in the mirror and say,

"Mirror, Mirror on the wall... Who is the handsomest sonuvabitch in The Second Fleet? You're right Mirror... Adrian 'Get in line, ladies' Stuke."

He would put on his Hollywood shades and flip-flops and toss his towel over his shoulder and enter the compartment doing his Aboriginal war dance and singing...

"I wonder, wonder whooo oo-oooo? Who wrote the book of love?"

"Adrian Stuke wrote the book of love... Is that right girls? You've got it... That's right ladies, no need to push and shove... Just take a number and get in line... There is enough of 'Mr. Wonderful' to go around... Bring your mothers, your sisters and your aunts... Big and small, short and tall... The man from Quincy can please them all. God's gift to the women of the world will be passing the Chesapeake Lightship shortly and your prayers will be answered and your wildest fantasies will be fulfilled"

"I wonder, wonder whooo oo-oooo? Who wrote the book of love?"

"I not only wrote it you little darlings... I make house calls... Trailer park visits... Give back seat instructional sessions and make personal charity appearances at old folks homes and Methodist picnics. Adrian Stuke could be the one to make a moment in his arms the highpoint of your life. Don't miss your opportunity... You will regret it the rest of your life. Adrian Stuke is brought to you by Arliegh Burke and The United States Navy, the same folks who gave you World War II and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea*. 'Mr. Wonderful' will be appearing for a limited engagement... Hang your bloomers on the bedpost, leave the porch light on and the door unlocked."

"Hey Dex..."

"Yo..."

"When you get to the Des-Sub Piers Gate and find a mob of females waiting on the 'Modern Miracle from Quincy'... Organize them in a line, in the order of descending bust size... And tell the gals at the back of the line to go home and take a bath and I'll catch them tomorrow night. Pick yourself out an ugly one, the 'Stookeyman' can afford to be generous to his shipmates."

"Hey Stuke"

"Yeah babe?"

"You know what is beginning to worry me?"

"What's that horsefly?"

"I think you are starting to believe this horseshit."

"No doubt about it... And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."

"Hey oh great and wonderful wizard."

"That's me."

"If we can scrape up a few bucks you wanna go up to Little Italy and catch a pizza when we get in?"

"Sounds good to me."

"I wonder, wonder whooo oo-oooo? Who wrote the book of love?"

Any low numbered boat that didn't have an Adrian Stuke must have had a dull moment or two...

We never did.

J-50, A Little Piece of Heaven by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In the old days when the boats pulled in, there wasn't any place for single guys to go. No place to haul off to for a hot shower, clean sheets... A real pillow and ten hours of uninterrupted sleep in peace and quiet.

In the late 50s... The days when an E-3 could blow his bi-weekly pay on two pitchers of beer, six Slim Jims, a long distance phone call, his laundry and a shoe shine... In the 50s, a bluejacket Seaman First spent a helluva lot of time broke. Big time busted.

Short of part-time bank robbery or selling the wardroom silver, there was no way he could bankroll a room at the Cavalier Hotel... Or even a cheap flea bag motel out at Ocean View.

Sailors today would never believe what a smokeboat non-qualified, non-rated bluejacket lived on... Or that the United States Navy paid less than the minimum wage of Polish potato diggers.

So when diesel boats in Submarine Squadron Six put their lines over and the married animals went bouncing across the brow for a hot shower, clean sheets and an armload of momma, the single idiots changed their mattress covers and went up to "T" Division on the Orion to catch a hot shower... A 45 minute shower... After a sixty-five cent, tender haircut.

But in the summer, with the sun beating down on the boat all day, the inside of a fleet snorkel boat got hot enough to forge horseshoes. There was no way to sleep inside one of the rascals... You could drown in your own sweat.

So after the sun went down we would drag our mattresses topside and rack out aft of the sail. The topside watch would keep guys returning with 'a load on' from stepping on you... And when the Krispie-Creme truck showed up the next morning, he'd get the

below decks watch to pass up hot coffee... Wake you up so you could sit up and have breakfast in bed, wrapped in a dew-soaked blanket.

After a couple of cups of coffee and four or five doughnuts, we engaged in a little known evolution known to E-3s as 'tampon drill'... Where you folded up your mattress like a hot dog bun and poked it down the after battery hatch. The morning messcooks would return them to the bunks. It was a little sloppy, but it worked unless it rained. Rickover would have had cardiac arrest if he had ever come waltzing down Pier 22 after dark. Hell, if he had, he would probably have built us a Howard Johnson out in the parking lot. Yeah, you bet.

One night Admiral Elton W. Grenfell, SubLant... The Big Kahoona himself, came down after dark. He came aboard the inboard boat in the forward nest... And spoke to the topside watch.

"Good evening son."

"Good evening sir."

"Why are those men sleeping on deck?"

"With all due respect sir, it's hotter'n two mice screwin' in a wool sock, down below."

"Why don't they go to their barracks?"

"Barracks? What barracks sir?"

"Your Squadron barracks."

"Squadron barracks? We've got a Squadron barracks? Where is it? No one ever told anyone in the Squadron about it... I've been riding boats in SubRonSix for damn near five years and I've never heard about any barracks, sir."

And that was it.

I have no idea if this is true. (Not that THAT has been a major obstacle to the writing in any other part of this literary masterpiece.) But, scuttlebutt had it that the Navy appropriated a wagonload of money to build barracks for each Submarine Squadron. When the money reached Norfolk, it was intercepted by DesLant and used to build a honking big tin can rec center.

It didn't take Admiral Grenfell long to Dick Tracy out the situation.

According to what we heard, Admiral Grenfell went into DesLant and told him that either he came up with some quality barracks space for his lads or he was going to form the damnedest working party Norfolk had ever seen and start tossing pool tables, ping-

pong tables, pinball machines, coke machines and any other inappropriate furniture out the windows of his gahdam tin can playpen and fill the sonuvabitch with racks for the men that he or his predecessor had shortchanged.

Grenfell was a salty World War II submarine skipper, tough as nails. A no bullshit guy who wasn't going to play 'Mother-May -I' with any tinhorn can sailor... And DesLant knew it.

The next day we were given the top floor of a modern, brand new barracks on the Main Naval Operating Base... J-50. The first night, Admiral Grenfell came up to the top deck with the Chief Master At Arms in charge of the lower decks.

"Gather' round... For those of you who don't know me, I am Vice Admiral Grenfell, Submarine Force, Atlantic. On behalf of the Force, I would like to apologize for the delay in providing this barracks space. From here on out you'll have a place for your ashore gear, so you can get your civilian clothes out of the locker clubs. I will expect you to police this space and change these racks regularly... And turn in your dirty linen and draw fresh changes at least once a week. I will hold you senior petty officers responsible for maintaining order up here. Any nonsense and your skippers will get a personal call from me and have to make a detailed report on the action taken. Believe me, you don't want that. When I light up a three-striper, he isn't very happy and adverse consequences usually run down hill. Am I fully understood?"

"Yessir..."

"Yessir, yessir..."

"Yessir..."

" My advice would be to settle differences somewhere other than here, take care of your drunks, hold down the grab-ass and racket and keep your chippies out of here. Use common sense lads... You're all grown men... Act like it. And one last thing... From here on in, don't let me catch any of you men dragging mattresses topside... Looks like hell. Carry on gentlemen."

I was there... Hemming was there... Stuke was there. When the old girl put her lines over we had a place to go... Place to drown our fleas in 45-minute sessions under water two degrees below live steam. A place to listen to a radio... Play records... Lose money in all-night poker games... Tell lies half the night... Read and catch up on sleep.

J-50 was as close to heaven that a raghat could get without dying.

The Submariner's Seabag by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There was a time when everything you owned had to fit in your seabag. Remember

those nasty rascals? Fully packed, one of the sonuvabitches weighed more than the poor devil hauling it. The damn things weighed a ton and some idiot with an off-center sense of humor sewed a carry handle on it to help you haul it. Hell, you could bolt a handle on a Greyhound bus but it wouldn't make the damn thing portable.

The Army, Marines and Air Force got footlockers and we got a big ole' canvas bag.

After you warped your spine jackassing the goofy thing through a bus or train station, sat on it waiting for connecting transportation and made folks mad because it was too gahdam big to fit in any overhead rack on any bus, train and airplane ever made, the contents looked like hell. All your gear appeared to have come from bums who slept on park benches.

Traveling with a seabag was something left over from the 'Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum' sailing ship days.

Sailors used to sleep in hammocks. You stowed your issue in a big canvas bag and lashed your hammock to it, hoisted it on your shoulder and in effect, moved your entire home and complete inventory of earthly possessions from ship to ship. I wouldn't say you traveled light because with one strap it was a one-shoulder load that could torque your skeletal frame and bust your ankles. It was like hauling around a dead linebacker.

They wasted a lot of time in boot camp telling you how to pack one of the sonuvabitches. There was an officially sanctioned method of organization that you forgot after ten minutes on the other side of the gate at Great Lakes. You got rid of a lot of issue gear when you went to the boats. Did you ever know a smokeboat sailor who had a raincoat? A flat hat? One of those nut-hugger knit swimsuits? How bout those roll your own neckerchiefs... The ones the girls in a good Naval tailor shop would cut down and sew into a 'greasy snake' for two bucks?

Within six months, every boat sailor was down to one set of dress blues, port and starboard undress blues and whites, a couple of raghats, boots, shoes, assorted skivvies a peacoat and three sets of leper colony-looking dungarees.

The rest of your original issue was either in the tender lucky bag or had been reduced to wipe down rags in the engineroom.

Submarines were not ships that allowed vast accumulation of private gear. Hobos who lived in discarded refrigerator crates could amass greater loads of pack rat crap than boatsailors. The confines of a diesel boat side locker and a couple of bunk bags did not allow one to live a Donald Trump existence.

Space and the going pay scale at the anchor end of the submersible social order combined to make us envy the lifestyle of a mud hut Ethiopian. We were the global equivalent of nomadic Mongols without ponies to haul our stuff.

And after the rigid routine of boot camp we learned the skill of random compression packing... Known by mothers world-wide as 'cramming'. It is amazing what you can jam into a space no bigger than a breadbox if you pull a watch cap over a boot and push it in with your foot... Of course it looks kinda weird when you pull it out but they never hold fashion shows at sea and wrinkles added character underwater appearance.

There was a four-hundred mile gap between the images on recruiting posters and the actual appearance of submarine sailors at sea. It was not without justifiable reason that we were called the 'sewer pipe' Navy.

We operated on the premise that if 'Cleanliness was next to Godliness', we must be next to the other end of that spectrum... We looked like our clothing had been pressed with a waffle iron and packed by a bulldozer. But what in the hell did they expect from a bunch of jerks hot-sacking in a 'Hogan's Alley Hell Hole' on a contraption that leaked like a screen door and smelled like a skunk jamboree?

After a while you got used to it... You got used to everything you owned picking up and retraining that distinctive pig boat aroma... You got used to old ladies on busses taking a couple of wrinkled nose sniffs of your peacoat then getting up and finding another seat... It came with Dolphins.

Do they still issue seabags? Can you still make five bucks sitting up half the night drawing a diesel boat and Dolphins on the side of one of the damn things with black and white marking pens that drive old master-at-arms into a 'rig for heart attack' frenzy? Make their faces red... The veins on their neck bulge out... And yell,

"Jeezus H. Christ! What in god's name is that all over your seabag?"

"Artwork, Chief... It's like the work of Michelangelo... Dolphins... My boat... Great huh?"

"Looks like some gahdam comic book..."

Here was a man with cobras tattooed on his arms... A skull with a dagger through one eye and a ribbon reading 'DEATH BEFORE SHORE DUTY' on his shoulder... Crossed anchors with 'Subic Bay 1945' on the other shoulder... An eagle on his chest and a full blown Chinese dragon peeking out between the cheeks of his butt. If anyone was an authority on stuff that looked like a comic book, it had to be this E-8 sonuvabitch.

Sometimes I look at all the crap stacked in my garage, close my eyes and smile, remembering a time when everything I owned could be crammed into a canvas bag. Maturity is hell.

We Keep Losing Good Stuff by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Someday, some progressive-thinking child of modernization will take a good look at the

impractical white hat and consign it to the big lucky bag in the sky. Don't laugh... Call the Psychic Hotline and ask Madam Fifi... The sonuvabitch is out of line when it comes to the fashionable naval forces of the world and they sure as hell don't cost enough to make whoever makes the damn things, rich. So, it will go like 13-button blues, Mammy Yokum boots and canvas foul weather jackets.

They'll go for something foreign. We seem to like to substitute homegrown, American winner stuff for overseas loser stuff like berets and goofy short-sleeve uniforms. It is hard to maintain tradition anymore.

Did you ever take a good look at the naval legends of World War II... Nimitz, Halsey, King, Morton, Cutter, and their like? They wore a handful of very meaningful ribbons over their left breast pocket, possibly accompanied by a set of gold aviator wings or Dolphins and a Combat Patrol pin. Now, take a look at a no-combat flag officer today... The sonuvabitch has ribbons and assorted badges, geedunk and meaningless horseshit bumping up against his gahdam shoulder boards... For what? Do you get the idea that the guys in the peacetime 'do nothing' forces spend far too much time pinning bullshit decorations on each other? What does all that crap stand for? Hell, the badges have proliferated at a rate that they have now spread over to the right side of the uniform. What happens when they run out of space? Trouser ribbons? Sock badges? Jeezus, will they start hauling around an E-3 with an awards bulletin board on wheels?

Any of you know what all that stuff means? I've seen Packard touring cars with hood ornaments smaller than the SEAL badge.

Remember the old days... You would see some foreign officer boogying down the pier all decked out in high collar whites with ribbons and worthless geedunk running from his neck to the vicinity of his belly-button.

"Hey chief, what'n the hell is that?"

"Dex, I think he's a Peruvian messcook... Either that, or something that fell off a gahdam Mardi Gras float."

And we all laughed.

Not funny anymore.

We've not only won the Cold War, we've won the *World-Wide Naval Silly-Shit Awards Race*. By this time, we must be leading by a wide margin.

You can be a doofus commanding a canned goods supply depot in East Jeezus and look like a Napoleonic field marshal. But are the bastards wearing all that hokey garbage, fooled into thinking it makes them a high flyer in the competency game? Do the medals make the man? Are the raghats impressed with all those doo-dads? Or does 'big-ears' turn to 'wingnut' and say,

"Are they going to pin another gahdam bingo badge on Ensign Wet B. Ears at morning quarters, chief? What'n the hell did he do for this one?"

"Hell, I don't know, kid... Maybe he remembered to brush his teeth regularly, or something. Who cares? The damn things don't mean shit."

That would be a shame because once upon a time, they did... They meant a lot. They were worn by men who earned them. They were more than 'been there, done that' souvenirs.

We have diminished the standard for so much that was once so meaningful to Americans. Our leadership has become complacent and has stood by uncaringly while many important things have been cheapened or whisked away like so many leaves in the wind.

For example, not so many years ago, our coinage stood for something... It was silver... Real, honest to God silver. When a bluejacket tossed a four-bit piece on a marble-top bar, you could hear the sonuvabitch ring as it danced its way across the top. We used to laugh at the clunky sound of other nation's money... The crap sounded like somebody tossed a handful of fishing sinkers on the bar.

First, it was chrome-plated base metal currency... Now, some kind of fake bullshit anodized gold one buck piece is in circulation. And we'll accept it... We always do. Vending machine designer currency. What has become in the buzz parlance of the 'what the hell' generation as the 'wave of the future'. To hell with the future... I miss a fifty-cent piece that rings.

I miss a lot of stuff. When I left the navy I love, a foreign car on the highway was a novelty. You took a good look at the damn things because you didn't see one that often, except for VW bugs that folks bought because they couldn't afford a real car.

You never saw big chunks of rubber and whole tread sections of tires littering the shoulders of the nation's highways. We made real tires back then. When you bought a car, the damn thing came with a real tire in the trunk... Not a piece of crap, wheelbarrow tire that came with instructions to drive at turtle speed to the closest gas station.... And no car came with a toy jack that couldn't properly lift a toaster oven.

I guess if you accept shit, the world gives you all you can handle. Then one morning you wake up and find a draft-dodging, worthless, good-for-nothing bastard in the White House getting nationally discussed hummers in the Oval Office and it's no big deal... You find you can pick up a presidential pardon for dope trafficking at your local Wal-Mart. In the near future, you will get silver Dolphins in cereal boxes and Purple Hearts for herpes.

It's sad, boys and girls... No, it's more than that. It is the legacy we are leaving future generations. They will never know the pride we had in what once was.

So one day, some high-priced, twinkle-toed star gazer will come up with a 'maritime fashion statement' hat. Some fancy 'glow-in-the-dark' creation with bells and fancy 'look at me' hardware, and the raghat will be history. Soon, the only place you will be able to find one will be rotting away in the sidelockers of sunken naval vessels, rusting away in the ocean depths. We will have lost another piece of our precious heritage and no one will care... And there won't be any raghat bluejackets any more... No sailors with white hats cocked down over one eye with that 'mothers lock up your daughters' look and money in his pocket that 'rings' when it hits the bar. It'll be gone. Why? Who the hell knows?

And submarines will be taking idiots on fun rides... Servicemen and ladies will be pinning meaningless bullshit all over their uniforms and sensitivity to everything will take the place of 'call 'em like you see 'em' folks with personal selective convictions.

The army has a new slogan... *'I AM AN ARMY OF ONE'*. What in the hell does THAT mean? How do you make a functioning team out of a unit of individuals who are armies of one? Who does an army of one report to? Himself? Do they operate as a team when and only when 100% of the, whatever it is, agrees to join in some mutually agreeable voluntary partnership? Come on now, if you can't recognize that for pure, unadulterated horseshit, check into the Betty Ford clinic and get the hell off whatever it is you're lighting up.

There is a memorial in Washington for the sailors of the United States Navy. It is a lone sailor, wearing a white hat with his peacoat collar turned up and his hands in his pockets. A typical American raghat... He's standing there with his seabag. Ray Stone and I worry about him... He is so out of step with the modern navy. We've considered going down some dark night and giving him eight rows of reflector tape ribbons, bolting on a G.E. refrigerator emblem, a chrome Mack truck bulldog, a Harley ornament, and a couple of Buick hubcaps to make him currently acceptable to the present day navy.

The last time I saw the poor bastard, he had three inches of snow on his white hat and shoulders. If you are driving through DC, you might consider giving the poor devil a ride back to Norfolk before he freezes to death.

He Never Stole Heavies by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Looking back over the ensuing span of forty years and sifting through the memories brings smiles to an old boatsailors face... The smile normally worn by a kid who got away with continually poking frogs down the bloomers of the 'Goddess of Proper Behavior'.

We had great times. I have always been glad that I didn't serve in submarines after they tamed the crews in order to project their idea of what serious professional decorum should look like. It was a time of adventure... The kind of life you dreamed of as a young lad. Riding diesel boats in the late 50s was fun. The fine men who had put our old worn-

out, shot-to-hell boats in commission, had won a war and in so doing handed us a swashbuckling legacy... They created and earned a reputation for being 'I don't give a damn' folks. In the late fifties, a lot of them were still around.

In those days, boats came with tubes that had actually fired stuff that had sent men and metal to the ocean floor. Some boats came with one hell of a meat-eater pedigree.... You had a feeling of pride as you popped a snappy salute to their colors as you crossed over them in the nest.

We still had 'walking decks', that allowed boatsailors to come topside and bullshit with lads on other boats. Some of the older boats that hadn't been tapped for conversion still had 'cigarette decks'... Where guys in working gear would come topside after chow and catch a smoke and inventory night stars for no other reason than it was great to be alive.

Some fellow on a computer board recently posted something, signed his name and rate and added, "We didn't steal heavies". Good for you, Horsefly... That tells me that you missed one helluva lot of fun. It also tells me that this fellow finds it very important that the world knows he was on a boat full of good boys... That in and of itself would have been good for a laugh in our day.

'Heavie rustlin' was great sport. It provided laughs... A good gang of heavie thieves were highly respected. Subron Six had some world championship line handler magicians... They could make heavies disappear right before your eyes. For example, nobody ever did it better than the guys off the Redfin or Cubera. Methodology was a tightly held secret... You could get Coca-Cola formula secrets, easier than boat specific heavie-stealing tricks. It was what boatsailors did... And what made it great was that you knew that the devious bastards stealing them would fight to be at the head of the line if you ever needed a whole blood transfusion. In those days it all came with Dolphins.

When I read that "I didn't steal heavies", I felt sad for the poor sonuvabitch... He just didn't get it. The poor bastard was obviously wrapped around the axle of some post smokeboat era concept of 'proper decorum and behavior'.

I'll bet my thirteen-button blues he never stood topside at a sunny morning quarters formation looking at his Chief of the Boat wearing shorts and a black Mexican Sombrero... Or had an Exec who wore sandals at sea... And he probably never crossed his brow in blood spattered whites with a broken nose... Never played 'King of the Dumpster' in Bermuda or took a piss in the outfield in the twenty-third inning of an 'all afternoon' beer ball game.

This lad was a four-oh sailor and I am sure his mommy must have been proud.

If my hunch is right, he never pinned a set of Dolphins on a barmaids panties or call for a 'tit squeeze and a beer' at Bells.

The shore patrol never had to talk him out of a tree.

That is sad in a way because as stupid as all that must sound to someone who never lived the life, it is what made us what we were. But in the 50s, no boat ended up on the front page because it sunk... Ran into something surfacing... Or worked for a Force Commander who had to go make a deep "let me kiss your ass" bow to the prime minister of what was once known as the Jap Empire.

We threw lads over the side because tradition held that no skipper pinned Dolphins on a dry shirt... And those Dolphins meant that the man wearing them, knew his entire boat... Could find and operate all gear blindfolded.

At the time, it was all we knew... It was what we were.

Every night when I go to bed I will drift off to sleep secure in the knowledge that somewhere there is a submariner who never lifted a heaving line... What a wonderful way to characterize your boatservice.

I can't help remembering the phrase..."I am not a crook".

I wore silver Dolphins and I rustled heavies... Bigtime.

The Smokeboat Roach by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Up on my submarine wall I have a small, framed print of a cockroach. The other night my blue eyed Scandinavian behavior monitor was standing there in her bare feet and cotton nightie... Jacked up to her fully-rigged, five foot-two and said,

"Why don't you get rid of that nasty looking thing? It has nothing to do with your submarine stuff."

"Nothing to do!! Are you serious? Darling, by the end of their careers, the only thing that kept diesel boats from just falling apart was that all the cockroaches were holding hands."

Submarines and roaches; a marriage made in Heaven. Can you visualize a smokeboat without the little bastards?

They came in damn near everything you got via the Naval Supply chain. They were the hidden prizes that crawled out of every box of Post Toasties. Life could be long and lonely if you didn't make friends with the little devils.

Before going to sea, we always drew stores from Mother Onion. The AS-18 was the world's largest stud farm for roaches... The little bastards were having sex and building

us a never ending supply of future generations at a rate rivaling nuclear chain reaction. Frequently, we found roach sex to be the most organized activity on the Orion.

When we loaded canned goods we stacked the cases two-deep in the passageways... Requiring an obstetrician to remove guys from the lower racks. All of the boxes were conveyances for at least twenty over-sexed, multi-legged critters.

They came in a variety of sizes from,

"Jumpin Jeezus, did you get a load of that big sonuvabitch?"

to,

"You *CAN'T* see that one?"

We painted a couple of them white so they could stand night topside watch. Some boats made little saddles so the little ones could ride the big ones.

One thing was certain, there sure was a helluva lot of them.

Once our trim pump crapped out... Being innovative smokeboat bluejackets, we solved the problem by having an E-3 walk fore and aft with a box of Krispie-Creme Doughnuts causing mass cockroach migration in his direction of travel. This produced the desired shift in weight effecting the necessary 'Rise' and 'Dive'.

At one point we used to pack them into tennis ball cans and shoot them out the signal ejector on intelligence gathering missions off Mainland China. Once the mission was complete they would return inside fortune cookies.

At night, we used to turn off the after battery lights and hunt up the ones that glowed in the dark... We would pack them in a Band-Aid can and mail them back to General Dynamics with a note reading, *'WRONG BOAT... SEND TO NUKES'*.

The really big ones usually hung out in the Forward or After Engineroom. According to a very scientific study conducted by Johns Hopkins in Baltimore it was found that roaches gravitated to diesel boat engine rooms because Enginemen and Machinist Mates had an intellect on par with a large roach and that facilitated communication.

We never laughed at the roaches. Who were we to laugh?...They were the only folks on the boat who were getting laid regularly after we hauled our lines aboard.

The little bastards were very active at night... I don't know if they are nocturnal creatures, but they sure owned the night on the old 481.

"Jeezus H. Christ!"

"What's wrong, Dex?"

"Hell, I was damn near dead to the world and some little roach sonuvabitch moved into my gahdam nose and started building himself a spare bedroom."

"The other night I had a visit from the little sonuvabitch who'd gone into the earwax-mining business."

The little rascallions covered a lot of territory at night. When somebody hauled off and crushed one of the little bastards, the entire population of the compartment would immediately go into a moaning and groaning lamentation.

"You killed Alfonzo... After all the money we spent on his college education."

"It wasn't Alfonzo... It was Herman, the one that played the piano."

"Herman Hell, it was Mickey The Messcook... Look for his little Qual Card... Two more weeks and he would have been qualified."

On a really dull run, you could stretch out the mourning period for a cockroach death and get at least two days of laughs out of it.

Everyone who rode Diesel Boats knows that the Emperor of every smokeboats roach population lived in your bread locker. Remember the old line...

"if you don't like raisin bread just shake it and all the raisins will get up and run away."

Diesel Boat etiquette required that any member of ships company passing the bread locker to knock... You also knocked before you opened the door to the bread locker and gave the little boogers enough time to go hide so the bright light wouldn't hurt their little eyes.

On one boat, when they had 'Repel Boarders' drill... Six really big roaches would come topside wearing bottle caps for helmets and carrying razor blades.

In SUBRON SIX... If a roach lived an honorable career... Never looked up at the skipper while he was flat on his back in the Old Man's mashed potatoes... Never crawled out of the Chief of the Boat's pocket in the middle of a dress inspection... Never tap-danced across the Exec's wife's fanny when she sneaked into the officers head for a tinkle on a visit... If they were good little smokeboat roaches when they died, they got to spend eternity in Thelma's lingerie drawer.

Submarine roaches reproduce at a rate that exceeds that of the increase in population of Northern China. There is no such thing as birth control in the cockroach world. So it never takes the little sonuvabitches long to damn near take over a boat.

When they started standing on top of each other... Formed bands and started holding close order drill at the regimental level, the corpsman lowered the boom.

We buttoned up the boat and fumigated it... In other words, we gassed the bastards.

When they completed the process, ventilated and cleared the air, we returned. The decks looked like the floor of a titty bar where folks eat roasted peanuts and toss the empty hulls on the deck... Only we were crunching around in a half-inch of dead bugs.

The Squadron Commander of SUBRON SIX should have worn silver roaches instead of eagles... They were the natural common denominator of the old boats.

So, my little Norwegian, that roach picture up on the wall makes me feel at home. For years, they were my shipmates.

By they way, anyone remember the fun we had watching mites doing back flips in your breakfast cereal?

The Men With The Pin by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

They returned ... Thousands of them... No, they numbered in the hundreds of thousands... Faces weather beaten, tanned... Smiling as they stepped down from trains all over America. Smiling that smile, universally recognized as that 'Damn!! It's great to be home!' smile.

They were home again... Those that were left. The survivors of a generation who left their homes and families to undertake the obligation of freedom-loving men to go into combat and ultimately defeat some of the most vile proponents of evil. They wore the story of their deeds and where they had been in rows of multi-colored, mute reminders above their pockets. What they had seen... What they had done and the personal losses they had suffered, would forever be in their minds when they looked up at their national colors floating gently in the breeze.

They are rapidly passing into the cold pages of history. The awesome respect in which they were held a half-century ago has given way to the gentle view point of the Monday Morning Quarterbacking of those who have grown up in a world of safety and extravagance... Of promiscuity and excess made possible because of *their* self-sacrifice.

Soon it will be impossible to find a combat pilot who stared at oncoming aircraft through a rotating propeller blade... A sailor who passed 40 mm shells to a loader in a battleship gun tub... A soldier who carried rifle ammo in eight round clips and ate crap that resembled dog food out of an olive drab can... In a Dutch ditch... In the rain.

Men who fought wars that lasted years, rather than days and ended with a clear-cut result. For those of us who rode boats that went below the surface, there were men who rode our boats when the close aboard sound of fifty pounds of TNT detonating would be clearly heard through several inches of steel. That 'steel' was U.S. built pressure hull and audible public prayer could be heard in every compartment. And when it was over, hardened men could hug each other, secure in the knowledge that no one would feel that they might be gender-confused.

These same men knew the sound of torpedo hits and the telltale sound of the result of such hits as the bulkheads of an enemy target collapsed while the enemy vessel made it's way to the bottom. Pressure-folding steel is a sound most of us will never hear, thanks to what these men did.

They had executed their war way beyond the established battle lines... Deep within the home waters of the Jap Empire. At a time when the Jap emperor and his militaristic toadies were assuring their easily duped people that they were secure, the people of Japan witnessed their merchant ships burning all along their coastal horizons. Ships, whose burning hulks were disappearing nightly, compliments of our *Undersea Warriors*.

So they returned ... What was left of them. They crossed the brow of boats that wore freshly painted enemy flags... Flags that chronicled their kills... A silent statement of their contribution to our victorious effort in the Pacific. It may have been a *Silent Service*, but little Jap flags painted on the sides of conning towers made it clear that the presence of our submarine force had been felt.

And above the jumper pockets of the men crossing to the pier, could be found the sterling silver representation of a submarine. The pin itself and each star worn below it, represented a war patrol which resulted in excess of ten thousand tons of enemy shipping sent to the bottom. The man or men who wrote the requirements for the awarding of that insignia wrote those requirements in such rigid and specific terms that the pin has never been watered down and reduced to the 'Crackerjack' prize that so many other military badges have become.

Today, the U.S. Submarine Combat Patrol Pin remains a symbol of men who have gone to sea and have drawn blood in defense of their country and way of life at the risk of their personal safety... If not the sacrifice of their futures.

Someday, the powers that decide such things, will come to their senses and will stop naming our submarines after geographical locations and hack politicians and start naming our undersea warships after the heroes who wore '*The Pin*'. Why they feel compelled to look elsewhere when we have such towering heroes of our own makes no sense to this old E-3. They named a whole *class* of tin cans after Admiral Arliegh Burke, proving that they can do it right... At times.

But, the men who parked torpedoes in the sides of so many enemy ships, held no inflated sense of their own importance. When you try to thank the old meat-eaters, they always reply with,

"Hell, I was young, scared and just doing my job."

Volunteering for submarine duty in wartime has never been routinely expected of U.S. Sailors. Volunteering has never been an exercise in goat-roping the timid and reluctant. The Draft Board never forced any citizen to fill the ranks of the Submarine Service. Any man, who found wartime employment inside a pressure hull, was there because he put himself there.

"Just doing my job."

Right.

Who in their right mind would choose a line of work that included sitting, sweat-soaked in darkness, 400 feet below fresh air and sunshine listening to canisters of high explosive detonate and shatter gauge faces and incandescent bulbs?

No, can't buy,

"Just doing my job."

To buy that, would mean that our Submarine Force was comprised of the worlds largest collection of complete raving lunatics. The last idiot who called a World War II submariner a complete lunatic is still trying to get used to his new glass eye, figuring out how to talk with his new teeth and walk upright.

They are ours... They handed us an unblemished record of service *'faithfully performed'*... A gallant record of deeds performed by incredibly brave and dedicated men.

Their ranks thin daily. We do not have a lot of time left to buy them a beer... Listen to their amazing stories and thank them for what they gave us and left in the pages of the history of The United States Navy.

The Poker Palace by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Requin didn't have an After Torpedo Room... We had what was called 'the Stern Room'. After World War II, at the beginning of what became known as 'the Cold War', the Navy created the concept of radar picket ships. It was before my time, but as I understood it, the Army and Air Force created something called 'the DEW line'. DEW stood for Defense Early Warning. It was a line of long-range radar stations that ran across the extreme Northern Latitudes of North America. Its' purpose was to give us the earliest indication

that our pals the Russians were sending us a load of nastiness via the Polar Route. The early warning was intended to trigger an airborne interception committee that would prevent the bastards from parking their ordinance in our back yards. It must have worked... Can't remember any real estate removal.

They modified American ships to extend radar surveillance across the ocean so as not to leave a void... An opening in the defense line between Hudson Bay and Norway.

Requin became an SSR... A radar picket conversion.

When they were no longer needed, the picket boats went into naval yards to undergo another conversion. Going to and returning from a picket conversion was an extremely radical procedure. Try to mentally visualize sending your 90-year-old granny in for a surgical conversion where she went from a go-go dancer to a hockey player.

In the 1940's initial conversion, Requin lost her four stern tubes. When she left the Charleston yards in '59 following her return to an SS boat, she had no tubes aft. Instead she had a Stern Room... A haven for snipes. No, more like a zoo where the animals were in charge.

Mike Hemming was a card carrying limb-swinger in the After Swamp. The snipes ran a 24-hour casino back there.

Some jaybird in the last conversion came up with the bright idea of installing a massive diner booth between the rudder rams. An oversized table with an over padded horseshoe shaped red naugahide bench. Installing a perfect poker table in a snipe nest, was the modern day equivalent of selling rot gut whiskey and repeating rifles to the Indians.

Requin had a black gang that could have operated under the Jolly Roger. It took them all of twenty seconds after we took in lines to go into business. They ran the damndest seagoing casino in the North Atlantic. It had everything, but mainly it had 'officer insulation'. If they had located a world class sprinter, pinned shoulder boards on the sonuvabitch and assigned him to Requin, there would have been no way he could have made it from the wardroom to the Stern Room ahead of the sound powered jungle telegraph. By the time any officer passed the After Engine Room, the gambling community had rigged from stud poker to reading Peter Rabbit books and singing gospel songs. (In port, you dogged the deck hatch and hung a cowbell on the compartment side handle, in case the topside watch didn't XJA the word).

The Wardroom never broke the code or figured a way to Jack-In-The-Box out of #3 sanitary or crawl in through the signal ejector. Mr. Schilling knew what was going on but his hands were tied and he knew that spilling beans would violate the Silver Dolphin code. He still owned old jumpers with Silver Dolphin pinholes over the pocket. The man knew what we were up to way before we did.

There was a downside to life in the Stern Room. Riding the surface in heavy weather made living in the Stern Room a lot like bunking down in the colon of a bucking bronco. Jeezus, it gave you a nasty ride... Anyone who rode a diesel boat in rough weather remembers how the stern figure-eighted all over the gahdam place... Most of the time your rudder was flapping like mud flaps on a tricycle and you got treated to the lovely sound of the rudder rams slamming repeatedly into the hydraulic stops... And the sound of a galvanized barf bucket sliding back and forth across the deck. Two terms immediately come to mind... 'Wild-ass ride' and 'Stinking mess'.

Once Rat Johnson made ravioli. The acidic content of the sauce could dissolve the treads off a Sherman tank. Rat's ravioli was gastric nightmare. It tasted great but it kept returning for several hours... Kind of a yo-yo culinary treat.

On the old 481, the cooks never programmed their meals with sea state in mind... So right before a projected heavy rolls experience we got regurgitating ravioli. When the Below Decks Watch rolled me out of the rack, I stumbled forward to find a dry foul weather parka... There weren't any, so I made my way to the Forward Engine Room to see if I could find something halfway dry that was draped over a Fairbanks cover.

The watch was changing there and some throttleman yelled over the noise...

"Holy Jeezus... You don't wanna see the gahdam after room... It has become 'the land of reappearing ravioli'. At least ten guys have launched the evening meal... And everyone swears they are near death."

In today's Navy, we would have all received the 'Rat Ravioli Survivors' ribbon, but in the old Navy, all they gave you was a next day field day with pine scented disinfectant and a Chief's brogan in your butt.

When I visited Requin in Pittsburgh before our first reunion, I dropped down into the After Room. It was gone. Some sonuvabitch had stolen the entire red naugahide poker palace. Then I thought about this car somewhere out on the highway between Pittsburgh and the Eastern Shore of Maryland hauling a wad of folding money... Six decks of cards and Mike and Flo Hemming.

"Don't worry Sweetheart... Once I pick Stuke and Armstrong clean, it'll be feeding time at the Zoo... Hell, we'll probably drive home in a Mercedes."

I knew that Mike would have cardiac arrest when he found out that some low life had hijacked entire snipe butcher shop.

What an 'After Battery' Was by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

They don't have them anymore. Well, they may have some for small-scale work but submarines don't carry anything like the 252 tons of batteries we carried. We hauled 126 tons aft and 126

tons forward, resulting in the professional hallmark of the main power Electrician... The most acid-eaten dungarees in the U.S. Navy.

The batteries aft were housed below the walking deck of the compartment that served as a kind of Sherwood Forest for the enlisted 'merry men' that made up the ships companies of what were this country's diesel submarines.

The After Batteries of the nation's submarines once served as the jolly clubhouses of some of the most materially deprived, hardest working, fun loving bastards that ever served at sea. It was a place where over time thin-skinned bluejackets grew armadillo hides and personal insult and leg pulling reached heights that would never be fully understood by the sensitive wing-clipped technicians of today's force. Nobody had to prove he was a good guy... A team player or one of the most generous bastards that ever lived... His Dolphins said that and his goodness was certified by the simple fact that he was accepted by his shipmates. This left him free to hurl outrageous insult, baseless, totally absurd accusations... And insensitive attacks on everything people hold dear. It was ships' entertainment... Kind of a playground game.

We were far beyond the civilizing influence of feminine contact. Nobody in his or her right mind would have considered stationing female naval personnel on a smokeboat... For the same reason that at the time, the Girl Scouts weren't holding Brownie meetings in gorilla cages at the zoo.

America still had places where red-blooded American boys could be rowdy and do and say what has since become socially unacceptable... And damn, it was fun. Nobody died, became irreversibly psychologically damaged or had his soul consigned to hell beyond future salvation. Submarines were iron canisters of rowdy fun-loving lads who engaged in a level of naughtiness that would have brought down celestial lightning bolts on a church picnic.

The humor was original, engaged in by all and relentless. Like prize fighting, if you dropped your guard and left a sensitive nerve exposed, left a vulnerable opening... You got tagged. That was how it worked... The rules were simple. If you didn't want to play... Get a transfer or go find a quiet place and slit your throat. Until you figured out one of the two choices... Stay the hell out of the alligator pit that was the 'After Battery'.

We received zero instruction in sensitivity and consideration of inner feelings. We didn't engage in lockstep behavior or mutual kitty licking. That would have been laughed off as total absolute bullshit.

We were all big boys and bouncing stuff off each other was a major part of the life we loved. There is a line in Owen Wisters, western classic, *The Virginian* where the Virginian tells Trampas,

"When you call me a sonuvabitch, smile."

We did a lot of smiling.

A modern submariner would probably find it impossible to understand, but beneath all the crap you would have found as fine a body of men as any that have given selfless, dedicated service to this nation.

Our problem seems to be that we never changed. Down-line, the sub force started to go with quiet machine spaces, clean air and the poopie suit of the day. Submarine skippers started crying on the televised evening news, the President found himself apologizing to nations responsible for the wanton death of millions... And we never went through the attitude scrubber or had our souls recalled for a sensitivity makeover.

We remain a pack of old crusty bastards who still throw our crayons in the air and don't give a damn if we color life way beyond the designated lines. Maybe we are weak-minded idiots because we can't live life or celebrate some form of service other than that, which we lived. Personally, I feel sorry for the poor, uniform of the day, bastards of the Sub Force today who have to get an authorization chit from the behavior monitor Chief, simply to sow oats and do a little pissing against the wind.

The sad fact is that you can't miss a life you never knew. When Hyman decided that technical competence was incompatible with diesel boats' happy-go-lucky professional competence, he created a eunuch society to go with decidedly weakened coffee in far more delicate cups. When you trade heavy rolls and sunsets, you lose.

If Rickover was around today and saw that adverse publicity newsprint involving his Navy far outweighs anything the peacetime smokeboat service ever racked up, I wonder what he would say. I wonder what he would say about his boat skippers up to their armpits in control room tourists running Disneyland OPS... Who knows? That might have been his vision of the future.

I miss it... I miss the hooting and hollering of good men. I miss the raw, unvarnished humor of the merry men of long ago. I miss not having a place where old men, who paid their dues at a time when forgoing crew comforts and gentlemanly hygiene were expected... A place where these old unsalvageable bastards can go and verbally kick hell out of each other simply for yukks.

They can tell us we have outlived our era... They can tell us we are out of step with the reality of today. We found very special women to marry us. Maybe they are the only ones who truly understand us. But no matter how they love us, we can never make them understand what the After Battery meant to us. Only the old gray-headed sonuvabitches, who parked their worthless butts on potato lockers, cussed the cooks and ragged each other, will ever know.

Maybe when we die... Maybe wherever you go they have an 'After Battery'... A bunch of unshaven dirty rascals sitting around an old nicked up messtable drinking coffee that

would float bricks... And when I step through the watertight door from the control room, some idiot messcook will hand me a cup and some old raggedy ass Engineman will yell,

"Hey Dex! Plant your worthless, good for nothing ass and tell us what's going on in the world of loafing Torpedomen."

And I will be home.

Angels in Lead Boots by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

One night when we were sitting around in the After Battery somewhere between the last reel of *Cheaper By The Dozen* and the arrival of mid rats. Some lower-order citizen in raggedy dungarees and a four-week old beard looks over at the chief and asked,

"Hey Dutch, you believe in angels?"

"Sure, horsefly. Not the kind with wings... The kind who wears rubberized, canvas suits and bronze helmets... Descend from above to save you... Navy Divers. When you hear those magnificent bastards clomping around on your walking deck, you can go back to issuing liberty cards."

Nobody respects and honors Navy Divers more than the lads who ride underwater ordinance platforms. Any man stupid enough to speak ill of a hardhat diver in the presence of a smoke boat sailor could count on the next twenty to thirty seconds of his future being filled with activity specifically designed to place his dental work flush up against his spinal column.

There's a line in an old vaudeville song called the *Darktown Strutters Ball*. It goes,

"Be down to getcha in a taxi, baby..."

...Or something close to that. They should paint that on the side of every ASR. That's what they do for a living... They come and get you. If you can reach bottom with watertight integrity, they will come get you. You can make book on that.

If you are beyond the 'Continental shelf', you will end up wearing your pressure hull as a pea coat and spending eternity with your crew... Either way, God and the United States Navy have removed all doubt about the ultimate outcome.

Our 'rescue vessel' was the USS Kittiwake. She was always tied up aft of whatever nest we happened to be in. There was something very comforting about her being there.

They used to do something with those big ugly looking diving suits... I think the proper name was 'deep-diving dress'. God did not provide me the size testicles it would take to

use 'Navy Salvage Diver' and the word 'dress' in the same sentence. They would hang those deep-diving suits up and perform some kind of maintenance on them.

Looking at them gave a kid riding submarines a good feeling... They were a silent symbol of a navy that gave a damn about her undersea bluejackets. If you could be gotten, men who wore those canvas suits would come get you. You knew that and it made you feel good about the outfit you belonged to.

That was a confidence the poor bastards who rode Russian boats never had... Or if they did, it was an ill-placed confidence, as became all too evident with the Manny, Moe and Curley ineptitude shown in their repeated attempts to bring up the lads of the Kursk.

If those idiots had placed a 911 call for U.S. Navy Divers, I have no doubt that a few more Russian boat sailors would be tossing down vodka with an arm full of Olga and Natasha tonight. The poor sonuvabitches ran out of air while a clown act tap-danced all over their superstructure. What a way to turn in your gear... Sitting in darkness, listening to idiots trying to 'get it right'.

Salvage divers hold a very special place in our hearts... As well they should. There are boat sailors alive today who got the opportunity to grow old, compliments of Navy Divers. Forget that and you become at best, an ungrateful sonuvabitch.

The ones I had the honor of meeting were big burley rascals, with hands the size of a picnic ham and fingers like half smokes. I never shook hands with the Jolly Green Giant but it has to be like shaking hands with a diver.

The rascals splice steel cable. I was a leading seaman... I know how to splice 3 and 5 lay hemp line... But gahdam steel cable? You've got to be out of your mind! That is how they get those oak bark fingers. You spend your career getting wire cuts all over your fingers and God compensates you for your trouble with hands like a junkyard crane bucket.

Fine brave unselfish bastards... God's weirdest emissaries, who descend from above in bronze helmets with lead belts and heavy boots to save mother's sons who make their living riding this nations submarines.

I work with a gentleman named Bill Duvall. I have known Bill for many years of professional association. He is an executive engineer with the federal government.

The other day, I learned that Bill Duvall was once Lt. Garner W. Duvall, a rated Navy Diver and OPS officer on the salvage ship, USS Cree. Bill Duvall, a Navy Diver.

This means I am obligated to buy this old saltwater 'breathe through a hose' bronze helmet soul-saver, cold beer and listen to his sea stories. E-3s learned early that if you failed to buy a hardhat diver his first beer, you ran the risk that the bastard would splice your toes together and hang you upside down in his paint locker.

But the best thing about learning that Bill was a diver is that it lets me say a long overdue 'thank you' to men who took incredible risk on our behalf... And Bill is the kind of man you expect a diver to be... A big smiling rascal with those vice grip mitts and an I-beam spine built to haul a couple of hundred pounds of working gear.

God bless all deep-depth divers.... wherever in the hell you are.

Lookouts - God's Idiots by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Mothers, when your male children are born, have them checked for the 'Lookout gene'. If they have it, kill them in their sleep or put them in a bag full of rocks and toss them in the nearest river.

If you can't bring yourself to do this, put anti-freeze in their formula and raise them in walrus hide diapers. Name them 'Stupid Idiots' and teach them how to stamp their feet and say,

"Jeezus, it's cold up here..."

and,

"Sir, my 7x50s are fogged up and I couldn't see a friggin' neon elephant out there."

Fortunately for this and all future generations, the only place you can see smokeboats anymore are on the *History Channel* or slowly decomposing in various cities throughout the nation. Nobody has found a way to embalm rust and arrest oxidation. It never ceases to amaze an old E-3 that very intelligent people have never figured out that no matter how much lipstick and make up you put on your dear dead granny there comes a point where her bloomers rot away and her butt falls off. Two inches of rust flakes covering the top of your pressure hull is a fair indication that 'granny' has worms.

There are no more smoke-belching iron submersible monsters anymore. No bridges where idiots in foul weather gear stand for hours with frozen nose hair and ice forming on their eyeballs. Places where men wearing padded gloves like a prizefighter try to adjust focus wheels on binoculars... An exercise that's a lot like trying to wind a Timex watch through a gahdam pillow.

Until 1959, I thought the ocean was clean and blue. Nobody told me that there were phone poles, empty oil drums and whole palm trees floating around in it. Nobody told me that when God was having a bad day, He could stir up his ocean and damn near turn your duty assignment upside down. Nobody told me that Mother Nature would put some of her ocean in with your Maxwell House. Nobody told me that blood circulation in my toes would become the entire focus of my attention for several hours at a time and that I would offer up prayers... Many, many unanswered prayers for a faster wristwatch and

spontaneous combustion to take place in my skivvies. The stuff nobody told me would fill the Chicago Public Library.

If you see the words 'Diesel Boat Lookout' on a man's resume, it tells you he was a professional idiot. If a man wrote, 'Lifeguard at a deserted beach', you would immediately recognize that the fellow had a loose screw. Lookout was essentially the same thing.

If a circus barge or a seagoing roller derby could have made an appearance, life could have been a lot more interesting. Only if from time to time, seagulls could have crashed into each other or a porpoise catch fire... Or a sea monster appear and take a bite out of your screw guards... Hell, we would have even settled for a flat-chested mermaid.

If you look up 'lookout' in the dictionary all it has is... 'Two jerks bored as hell, wanting the world to explode.'

To make things worse, Uncle Sam put a two-striper up there. A gentleman whose entire lexicon of the spoken word was,

"Check you contacts", "Take a sweep around", "Mind your helm", and "Knock off the bullshit".

Bullshit was the thin connection we had with civilization... That and opening and closing the zipper on a heavy weather parka. Slaves on Roman galleys had a big oar to monkey with... All we had were a pair of binoculars with so many scratches on the lens, it made you think the cockroaches had taken up figure skating.

It was a weird way to make a living. I guess in a war when there are folks out there whose sole purpose in life is to pack your boat off to Hell in a flash of fire, you become important. Not so in peacetime... Radar, sonar, and satellite observation are important... In peacetime, lookouts are a clown act.

But it had some great moments, some extending into wonderful hours in the sun. Days when seas were flat... Seabirds soared above you... Porpoise frolicked in your bow wave when it was great to be alive and being a lookout was the best job on the boat. On those days, hours passed too quickly and you wished you could capture some of the fresh air and sunshine to store and use in the months of winter operations.

When you see submarines gliding along on the surface in movies... Just sliding along gently moving up and down in an almost symphonic motion, you remember those times and how truly wonderful they were.

Getting old, you tend to have perfected your own style of complaint. I have fun exaggerating stuff... Amplifying the discomfort for effect... Old folks used to call it 'gilding the lily'.

If you had a shipmate like Adrian Stuke, being a lookout was great... You enter either one of us in a liars contest and the best anyone else could come in would be second place. We perfected our techniques, lying to each other for hours on the bridge. Lookouts run out of the truth in six months, then it gets lost in home-grown horse manure which is exchanged as the only negotiable currency an E-3 has. You just spend hours trading it back and forth like two fairy tale merchants.

There were never small leaks on submarines, they were all monsters... When you lost your bubble, you always passed 600 feet with a 45° down angle... All Chief of the Boats had hair and horns... All cooks were trying to kill the crew. The air was always lousy... The bread was stale and roach populations reached epidemic proportions. The boat was only held together by two rivets and chewing gum, and no woman ever created could resist any boatsailor in Subron Six.

You believe any of that? Good... Now wanna buy some vacation property in a Florida swamp?.

We had Ugly Enginemen by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The Good Book tells us that God created the earth and all in it, in six days and that he and Moses pulled a twenty-four on the seventh day. The Creation was a fairly complicated exercise in fabrication and I figure they were pulling liberty every night so it's no wonder they turned out things like, giraffes, armadillos, hippos, hammerhead sharks, and duck-billed platypuses. They had to have been half-in-the-bag when they bolted some of that stuff together.

Late on Friday night, He created Enginemen... They must have been so bent out of shape, they had no idea what they were making... Nobody would have created an Engineman on purpose.

After a few million years (That is like a first-time enlistment for deities and their immediate families), God contacted John Holland and said,

"Hey John... Build me an iron contraption I can fill with some of my most marginal idiots and stick underwater out of sight. And then I'll cram a bunch of Enginemen in the iron monsters to liven the damn things up. After fifty years or so, I'll create a 'Mike Hemming' and turn that wild man loose on one of those subsurface looney bins just to see what happens."

Since then, the U.S. Submarine Force was never the same.

I have it over the rest of you. I actually rode with Mike aka 'The Boy Throttleman'. We were true shipmates. I am sure, given the odds, there must have been other Enginemen as crazy as Hemming, but at least the good Lord fixed it so that they never turned up in the same squadron.

The Engine Rooms were located aft of the After Battery compartment. There were two Engine Rooms each containing a pair of Fairbanks or General Motors engines. The 'Jimmies' (General Motors) engines were configured in a "V" cylinder arrangement and the Fairbanks 38 Ds were configured in opposed-piston fashion with an upper and lower crank shaft connected to a vertical drive. The engines drove 500 kw generators that fed batteries or the electric motors that drove the boat. Engine rooms were noisy, dirty, stunk of smoke and oil, and the interior decor was made up of collections of overflowing butt kits, oily rags, dirty coffee cups, maintenance manuals covered with dirty fingerprints, torn skin books and scroungy, raggedy-ass Enginemen.

Every lad who rode diesel boats will tell you that being an Engineman or a Machinist Mate made you special. We all remember them... We can see their laughing faces. The crazy bastards had the toughest job on the boat. There was no such thing as a 'light' engine part. The rascals who built the power that kept the old gals plowing saltwater, worked with tools that were Paul Bunyan size. To be an Engineman, a man had to have the arms of a gorilla, the spinal column of a mule, and possess the mechanical ability of a railroad engineer.

They were good... Damn good. In the age before nuclear power, with its aseptically clean engine spaces and spotlessly attired personnel, there were big laughing bastards who kept power going to the big bronze screws that drove iron ships across oceans and helped win a war.

Being an Engineman or a Motor Mac doesn't get you a lot of recognition. The Navy, God bless it, has a reputation for clean efficiency... Clean, well regulated ships and crews... Uniform of the day... Shined brass... Well painted... And officers who looked like they fell off a wedding cake. Submariners in the old smokeboat navy didn't fit that image... And the guys riding herd on the rock crushers that provided propulsion to the diesel-powered fleet submarines were 180 degrees out from that image, so their contribution has never been recognized or acknowledged.

That's a gahdam shame because they did tough work under as rough a set of conditions as any man should be called upon to endure and took it all, including the unmerciful ragging of their shipmates... In good natured stride.

These stories have become an idiot's feeble attempt to recapture a time in submarine history nobody cared about enough to record. From 1945 to 1970, a lot of very good men rode petroleum-powered submarines. We did the unheralded bull work while the sunbeam-powered undersea love boats, the glamorous sweethearts of the heavy braided who, along with their P.R. flacks, were giving the nukes hugs and kisses.

The Navy was building undersea craft that only required some clown to toss a shovel full of neutrons and protons in the propulsion hopper every ten years so they could spend months at a time disturbing marine life. But at the same time, big, ugly hairy-chested, whisker-loaded rascals were still punching holes in the ocean with old wornout pigboats.

And we had Enginemen and Machinist Mates who nursed 32,000 horses in each engine room... Kept them driving generators that made all the sparkies it took to push the old iron scrap yard cheaters, through the saltwater.

Oh hell, we knew that we were no more than warts on the behind of the great *Goddess of the Main Induction*... The redheaded step children at the family reunion, but dammit, the Navy owed us a few paragraphs to record our passing. Once there were guppy boats... Fleet snorkel conversions... Radar picket boats. Jeezus, how could they gloss over the Cold War contribution of the lads who rode the picket boats? There were boats rigged for UDT (underwater demolition teams) and later SEALs. Hell you could go on and on... But nobody ever did.

You turn on your idiot box and watch programs about 'Submarines', and lately there has been a lot of stuff about the boats. At the end of the program your family turns to you and asks,

"Didn't you do any important stuff?"

"Guess not. We just were out there... Smelling weird... Drinking coffee you could patch potholes with... Breathing lousy air, smoking a 'dollar a carton' sea stores and doin' nothing worth mentioning."

But we had Enginemen... We had big ol' noisy, stinking, smoke-belching engines. Every one of us remembers trying to work his way past engine covers laying in the passageway and greasy, cussing Enginemen and Motor Macs

"Hey Bobby Ray... Ya having bad luck?"

"Bad luck... Are you kidding, horsefly? Hell, with my luck, if I was Jane Mansfield's baby, she'd bottle feed me... You going forward?"

"Heading that way."

"Well why don't you drag your worthless ass back here with a cup of whatever Rat is perkin' in the pot?"

When an old bastard who wrench-wrestled submarine diesel engines throws his earthly gear in the big Lucky Bag, he goes directly to Heaven... No gahdam receiving station... He reports directly on board one of those low hull numbered, solid gold smokeboats at the big silver pier in the sky... Wears clean socks and silk dungarees... Gets to park his old wornout butt on a rocking chair in the Engineroom and tell lies... Go forward late at night for mid rats of humming bird wings on toast and decent coffee... And there's always a big-titted blonde to scratch his back in the places he can't reach, with a short handled box wrench.

That's something they missed on the History Channel and the book *'Blind Mans Bluff'*. While folks were out there bluffing blind men, Mike Hemming and Bobby Ray Knight were out there cussing... Up to their eyeballs in grease and lube oil, baby sitting cantankerous machinery and just being hardworking happy-go-lucky sonuvabitches... And they were not alone.

They don't put up statues of sweat-soaked stinking raghats in parks but somewhere there should be one to the Smokeboat Engineman with a greasy bandana hanging out of his hip pocket and a dirty cup full of coffee in his hand... But it will never happen, horsefly. It's all about stuff powered by snap, crackle and pop that could fry your cajones... Encased in lead, that lasts for years.

I know... I watch the History Channel.

Oh yes... At the big silver pier in the sky, nobody has to fight for a fuel hose or gets blamed for oil slicks.

East Main by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Do Do birds, dinosaurs, three-cent postage, and East Main Street in Norfolk, VA.

Gone... Way gone, and as the old fellow said,

"Ain't never comin' back."

East Main was right up there with Sodom and Gemorrah... The 'Black Hole of Calcutta' and the lowest level of the largest outhouse ever built. The city fathers of Norfolk refused to admit it existed... Clergy were afraid it existed... Decent people would drive six unnecessary blocks to avoid it... And the Devil ran it.

If Guinness had a record for the most sleazy bars per square inch, it would read. 'East Main, Norfolk'. They sold enough draft beer on a Saturday night to fill the New London diving tank... And most of it got pissed away in the adjacent alleys on the way to the bus stop up on Granby Street.

Let's put it this way... When Queen Elizabeth visited the United States, she instructed her pilot not to fly over the place.

East Main was the K-Mart of whoredom. If you had twenty bucks and you couldn't satisfy any particular lust desire you were hauling down there, you had to be into something involving baby ducks and penguins. The place was a veritable Casbah of Carnal Delight. The place was so bad, it didn't even register a blip on the Morale Richter Scale.

One of the practical factors for Torpedoman Third read, 'Have you ever been rolled on East Main?' Followed by, 'Was she kind enough to stick your ID and liberty card in your sock before she vanished with what was left of seventy bucks and your wallet?'

Most of the gals who worked 'East Main' had been raised in the wilderness by wolves... But every now and then, you would come across some honey who had been raised in something with a roof and had once been within a half mile of a church... And those lovely ladies would just steal your money and tuck the photos of your mother, girlfriend or your great aunt Dorothy, in your jumper pocket.

The sonuvabitches at New London and Great Lakes never told you about 'East Main'. That's like taking some poor, ignorant bastard to the beach and forgetting to tell the idiot that monster sharks ate up to five or six citizens a day there.

In the late '50s, you had to learn a lot of important submarine sailor stuff on your own. It was expensive, often involved consultation with a corpsman and conversations with regulatory authorities and officers. Most Senior Chiefs were indifferent and took a "It serves you right, you dumb sonuvabitch" attitude, unless you returned with something so exotic that you were a public health menace or actually crossed the brow in flames.

Nobody gave you a diploma for an East Main education. If you rode a smokeboat in SUBRON SIX, you got 'East Main qualified' way the hell before you got 'submarine qualified'.

"Hey sailor... Looking for a good time?"

It didn't take an E-3 long to figure out that a Norfolk gal's definition of a 'good time' was a blind drunk bluejacket... Wallet-less... No raghat... Wearing one shoe and an inside-out jumper... Doing his mattress-tongued damndest to speak his mother tongue to totally disinterested constabulary forces.

East Main... You could find every sin covered in every religion in the world, in three or four blocks. It was a place established simply for the purpose of selling beer to stupid people - Who passed it from mouth to kidney... To bladder... To urinal... To the Elisabeth River - While enjoying the convivial company of fat women with hairy upper lips.

Fortunately, East Main was destroyed before its degenerative effect could infect the Rickover fleet. This would probably be viewed most positively by most normal people... A big step forward along the road of the kinder, gentler, more responsible undersea service of today.

But if you were once nineteen and wanted to grow old one day and be able to tell stories on a balmy summer night about jumping into an alligator-loaded septic tank and surviving it, East Main can return a few smiles. In days long ago, you weren't allowed to call yourself an East Coast submariner until you had treated yourself to a wallow or two on East Main... And old timers hauled around seabag-loads of stories about the place.

When they destroyed East Main, some of the establishments packed up and moved out to Hampton Boulevard... Like rats leaving a warehouse fire.

As long as there are American bluejackets, there will probably be a market for sex and beer. Whores, barmaids, taxi drivers, and shoeshine boys... And the concrete sidewalks won't get any softer. Maybe they will install padded seats and stereo surround sound in Shore Patrol wagons, but I doubt it. And they probably won't collect those two-foot oak billy clubs they issued the SPs and give them marshmallow-coated fairy godmother wands instead. But what the hell, those of us who were a part of it... Who survived... Who left a large part of their meager earnings stuffed in bra cups and cash registers there... It brings back a few good sea stories. Sea stories after all, are what God gives sailors to keep them smiling in old age.

East Main was a five-star hell hole where you could buy passion in fifteen minute increments from women whose panties went up and down like a tin can's signal flags... Drink cheap beer and pee in the street. They never held a Shriner parade or Methodist minister's convention there, but to a lot of old bent up, stove in bluejackets, 'East Main' was a 'preview of coming attractions'... Coming soon at a hell hole near you.

I Still Remember One Navy Nurse by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

It was after dark. Didn't have anything to do, so I went topside and got to talking with some other non-rated jaybird and we came up with an idea that sounded brilliant at the time.

Since we had the duty that night and we were scheduled to paint the port side of the boat the following day, why not get permission to list the boat and wire brush the limber holes and zinc chromate them. That way we could grab some hose and a paint pot, the next day paint the side, haul for a noontime beer at Bells and find some soft flesh, a shower and clean sheets before the rest of the animals showed up. Well it sounded like a great plan and probably was... At least it was until I grabbed a limber hole just forward of the conning tower fairwater... In the vicinity of the aft bulkhead of the Forward Battery. The rim of the limber hole had been badly dinged up and had a burr on it like a razor blade. It sliced through my leather glove and the hand I was holding on with... I dropped the wire brush and grabbed on with my right hand to keep from falling between the tank tops.

The topside watch on the inboard boat jumped down and held me until my topside watch could haul me back aboard. There was a lot of blood squishing around in the fingers of my glove and by now the Duty Officer was topside. They pulled my glove off.

Officers feel compelled to begin every conversation with a statement of the obvious and deliver a lecture on your enlisted stupidity. Officers in the course of their assigned duties get paper cuts or a hurt thumb from a falling coffee pot lid. Bluejackets, God

bless'em, monkey with stuff that can, on a bad day, cut you in half, crush you or remove sizeable chunks of your anatomical appendages.

"Jeezus sailor, what in the hell did you think you were doing?"

"Wire brushing limber holes."

"At night?"

It was darker than a gahdam well diggers hip pocket, so I figured after four years at Annapolis this J.G. could have figured that one out on his own.

"Yes, sir."

"Why in the hell are you doing that?"

"The COB beats us sir... And makes us work at night."

I wondered what kind of toe-dance Dutch would do when Mr. 'wide-awake' hit him with that load of horse manure.

"There's no corpsman aboard so you guys take him up on Orion."

'You guys' is a term used by officers so recently assigned that the only names they know, eat off gold rimmed plates in the wardroom.

"You guys, bear a hand and get this lad up to the sick bay on the tender."

Who is this guy? Jeezus, he's five years older than me and he's calling me 'lad'? So, I wrapped a greasy bandana around my hand, which was looking a little on the messy side by now.

Any trip to the quarterdeck of the Orion was the poor man's equivalent of a trip to the Magic Kingdom at Disneyland. The USS Orion (AS-18) was a floating rest home for brown-bagging CPOs. When all the Chief Petty Officers left the ship at once, the draft decreased by four to six feet. I once asked Stuke where they found all those idiot chiefs.

"Dex... One time, this fellow who worked in the research department of the Institute for Dumb Bastards brought in one of those Mexican Piñatas full of Chiefs hats."

Stuke always could explain everything.

Well, the next thing I know I'm up on the quarterdeck of Mother Orion where some two-striper and this senior Chief 'What's- iz- mate' have established their mini-kingdom.

Chief 'I don't miss any meals' says,

"C'mere kid... Let's take a look at that gash. That thing's gonna need some looking after."

This guy had to have been one of the Three Wisemen.

The two-striper is now on the phone with some nameless authority somewhere in the bowels of the ship that never goes anywhere. In my time in Squadron Six, the state of Rhode Island and Orion moved about the same distance.

"Son, the doc says we need to run you up to sick bay up on the main base."

So the next thing I know, I'm in a jeep desperately in need of a valve job, being driven by a first class, titleless WAVE yeoman from Orion.

We stop at the Main Base Gate and Mr. 'Where the hell am I?' gets directions. In his protracted conversation I hear..."He's one of those stupid submarine guys" used to refer to the jerk who now is in a great deal of pain. He gets in and shifts into gear.

"Horsefly, I may be a stupid submarine guy but I never forget a face... You use that term one more time and I will hunt you down on the beach and do my damndest to punch everything between your eye brows and your chin, out your rectum."

The rest of the trip was made in silence.

We arrived at the sick bay. Some guy in undress blues with bandage scissors and a thermometer in his pocket met us. He took me into this clinic that smelled like antiseptic... Like somebody spray-painted the place with Lysol.

He said, "Let's take your temperature."

"Ace, I don't have the gahdam mumps.. I've gotta cut-up hand."

But it seems some cornball somewhere made a Navy Reg concerning temperature taking and it was either do it or they just let you die.

There I was with this glass stick stuck in my face, when this vision of total loveliness appeared.

She was about thirty... With cute blonde hair peeking out from under this starched white nurses hat with Lieutenant stripes on it. She took my hand in her gentle hands and unwrapped the nasty bandana and dropped it in a stainless steel waste bucket.

"We won't be needing that."

It was the last one I had... But what the hell, at that particular moment that sweet thing could have tossed my dress blues in that can and I wouldn't have cared... I was in

love... At nineteen, there is no distinction between lust and love... Same package. She could have removed my kidneys with a rusty jack knife and it would have been perfectly okay.

She gave my hand a little gentle ladylike squeeze... Lightning shot out of my ears... My toes all shot off like Roman candles... The roots of my hair died... And my heart ran backward.

"Can you feel that?"

"A little..."

Dex, you lying sonuvabitch... If she does it again, you know damn well they are going to have to haul you down off the roof of this place.

God, she smelled good. Her voice was that of an angel... I looked down at my red lead-spattered brogans and the holes in my dungarees.

"Ma'am... I don't always look like this."

"Oh, don't apologize... I'll get Doctor So-in-so and we'll have you back to your ship in no time. Now, listen to me, you will have to keep that laceration clean... No more dirty handkerchiefs, okay?"

Anything you say, you creature from the Garden of the Goddess of Love.

"Yes ma'am, I'll do that."

The Doc arrived... He looked like he fell off the gorilla delivery wagon.

He gave me some kind of pain killer-shot... Had Miss Vision of Overwhelming Desire clean up my hand... Painted it with brown stinky stuff and stitched me up.

Miss Lady of Hypnotizing Perfume... Bandaged me up and stuck me with a Tetanus shot.

Why do women look so damn good in those starched white uniforms? She had on one of those starched white uniforms... She had on one of those lift'em up, bras... And her breasts went up and down as she breathed... Did I mention that she smelled really good?

When she sat down on the stool to write out a prescription, instructions to give to Doc Rohre and a light duty chit... She had her back to me... She had a very cute fanny and you could see the outline of her panty elastic... I was fighting sexual fantasy overload.

No wedding ring?... No wedding ring!! Are all the officers in the Navy blind?

"OK sailor, you'll be as good as new in no time. Be a good boy and don't let it get infected or you'll be back in here... Your driver is out there waiting to take you back to your ship. What kind of ship are you on?"

"The rust bucket of the fleet."

"Bye now."

And she was gone... Gone... Out of my life forever. leaving nothing but two years of late night sexual fantasies dancing behind my eyeballs.

And It Never Got Any Better by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

At night, when the crews berthing in the After Battery was jam packed with dog-tired animals, it was a far cry from a silent sanctuary... We had snoring bastards that sounded like a walrus sing-along.

You could throw raw meat to a pack of hungry lions and generate less racket.

After a couple of weeks underway, the place looked like a tornado had passed through it, followed by an atomic bomb drop. Stuff hung from vent operating handles, was stuffed in overhead ventilation lines and the passageways looked like a Hindu village dump... Shoes, boots, foul weather gear... An odd coffee cup... Books, magazines... You name it, we tripped over it.

Since guys were constantly going on and off watch on a twenty-four hour rotation, folks were always sleeping or attempting to sleep. To accommodate these lads, the compartment was kept in red light... Illuminated in the glow of red-lensed interior lighting.

Red light provides just enough light to move around in but not enough light to find a shoe that had walked off in the roll of a state five sea... Or to keep you from crushing a watch that fell off a homemade bunk chain hook. You show me a smokeboat sailor who never found a sharp object with a bare foot in red light, and I will show you a two-week reservist.

Hogan's Alley was a mini- kingdom inhabited by individuals who considered themselves so far beyond the concept of 'shipshape' that it had no meaning within their limited recollection. I have never visited a public toilet in Afghanistan but I would imagine a Hogan's Alley resident would feel right at home.

Martha Stewart, Betty Crocker and Mr. Clean bunked in the Wardroom... Godzilla and thirty of his closest relatives racked aft. The rest of your life you could live anywhere without complaint after being conditioned to Alley life.

Submariners are oblivious to the concept of 'mutual consideration'. We, and I include myself, didn't have any idea that the 'Golden Rule' applied to the fore and aft passageway that passed through the After Battery... It was simply a warpath through Indian territory.

The chow line formed in the After Battery passageway. Submarine chow lines are a progression of hungry individuals who, while waiting for their fellow shipmates to stuff food in their faces engage in high decibel meaningless bullshit conversation, play 'grabass', a form of adult roughhousing, and park their loafing butts on the middle racks where their fellow citizens are doing their damndest to sleep. Without disgusting amplification let us simply say... God never intended the human nostril to be less than four inches from the hip pocket vicinity of a Machinist Mate in week old dungarees.

Any man who crawled into a middle rack in the outboard passageway was either a new guy aboard... Or a complete idiot.

When God created man, he decided to pull a terrible joke on subsurface bluejackets and he created the 'Below Decks Watch'... An idiot with a clip board, a flashlight and the discretion of your average chipmunk. These clowns spent their four hour tour checking rig bills, valve alignment, guage readings, sanitary tank levels, making coffee, getting permission to blow or discharge stuff to sea... Checking bilges and waking the ongoing watch.

Their comedic sadism became evident when they applied their squirrel brains to wake the watch relief. In Hell, E-3s will get to wake the bastards who racked us out for watch. The Devil made us that promise the day he gave us Dolphins in exchange for our souls.

They had a clipboard with all the names of the guys in the ongoing watch section listed. At around 45 minutes to the point where the ship changed the underway watch, these 'Handmaidens from Hell' would circulate among the peaceful sleepers and rudely awake those in the follow-on watch.

On Requin, the monster who woke us up, did it like he was arresting criminals... He would grab your belt between two belt loops and jerk you out into the void between your rack and the passageway deck and let go, whispering,

"Welcome to the world, Morning-Glory."

Or,

"Up and at'em, Defender of the Free World."

"Jeezus, you warped bastard... You motherless creep... What time is it?"

"Time for you to hit the deck, sweetheart."

"Bullshit... There's nobody up this time of night but burglars and bad wimmin."

"And you, Horsefly."

"I want to talk to the Chief of Naval Operations... This shit isn't healthy for a growing boy."

"Knock off the crap... Where's your idiot running mate, Stuke?"

"How would I know? It isn't my week to watch him. Go find him yourself, Dick Tracy."

"Here put on these red goggles so when you go into the messdeck, you don't screw up your night vision."

"Why don't you shove'em up your..."

"That's enough wiseass crap out of you sailor... Rock and roll... MOVE IT!!"

I hear on nuke boats they leave a mint on your pillow and a big busted blond wakes you up with a kiss... She gives you a back rub, takes a hot shower with you, dries you off... Hands you a velvet smoking jacket and gives you a piggy back ride to mid rats. Mid Rats in the Moonbeam Navy consist of things like humming bird tongue finger sandwiches, crab cakes, Baluga caviar, scrambled robin eggs and vanilla shakes.

Whatever happened to stale bread, self-sealing mayonnaise, Kraft neoprene cheese, green-rimmed baloney and coffee that looked and tasted like it was drained out of a dumptruck crankcase?

Injudicious Language by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Injudicious? Probably... Inappropriate? No... Make that, HELL NO!

This stuff is admittedly inappropriate for Little Golden Books, Mr. Rodgers and Captain Kangaroo. Never rode boats with either one of the gentlemen. If either one of them rode submarines, I can assure you the hull numbers were above 571.

There is a theory... The law of declining social acceptability. The formula states that male communication and gentlemanly behavior deteriorates in direct proportion to distance separating that body of men from mothers. Women... The ladies in our lives are the civilizing influences that keep sailors from living in trees and resorting to cannibalism.

I never met a Chief Petty officer who talked like William F. Buckley. There may have been a couple somewhere, but the bastards didn't ride smokeboats in Subron Six... Neither did anybody's Mom. If she had, a lotta guys would have been gargling buckets

of soapy water. No, living a life far beyond the gentle influence of the fair gender led to a rapid vocabulary reduction where words like 'frigging thing' and 'that gahdam sonuvabitch' could be universally applied to damn near any object on the planet... And everyone understood exactly what you were talking about. For those of you who never found yourself stretched out under a piece of cantankerous machinery weighing more than your family car or a bank vault, with oil dripping in your face, it may be difficult to understand how pointing to something and saying, "Hey Jack, toss me that sonuvabitch.", can relieve you of the mental gymnastics involved in recalling its correct nomenclature.

"Somebody kick that frigging thing over here." and "Hey Topside, bear a hand and drop that big bastard down to me." are fully understood requests to any idiot who ever rode boats powered by the residue of decomposed prehistoric creatures.

Men who rode submersible craft propelled by cosmic pixie dust might have difficulty, but I can assure you that any lad who rode Jimmy and Fairbanks boats understood the universally applied vernacular of the diesel service.

I always wondered what gals in a convent exclaimed if they happened to drop a bowling ball on their big toe... Boat sailors could have helped them out by providing them with six or seven words they probably missed.

People say, "Dex, nobody would ever publish your stuff because of all the inappropriate language."

Inappropriate to what? Sure as hell wasn't inappropriate to diesel submarines.

For those of you wading through this morass of idiocy, let me explain. Somewhere in the New Testament, God speaks to Barnacle Bill... Well, maybe it wasn't God... Maybe it was Noah's Chief of the Boat. I can't remember, but it was somebody... And he said,

"Ye who ride Diesel Boats will be forgiven the use of injudicious language for thou art engaged in toil inside some of the damndest contraptions ever created and ye shall receive blanket amnesty for verbal transgression in the performance of your assigned obligations."

That was later extended to cover all the bars on Hampton Boulevard, Naval Operating Bases, sea stories told anywhere and on liberty anywhere other than within a hundred miles of where your mother and any other female relative were currently geographically located.

I hope this Biblical reference will eliminate, for those of you seeking to save my soul for the use of naughty words, the need to communicate your concern.

A lot of boat sailors have by this time stowed their gear in the 'Golden Sidelockers of the Silver Smokeboats in the Sky'. The folks that run the squadron up there are pretty

perceptive people. By now, some damn Machinist Mate has to have dropped a harp on his toe, so the language can't come as a startling revelation.

Submarine Chiefs by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

One thing we weren't aware of at the time but became evident as life wore on, was that we learned true leadership from the finest examples any lad was ever given... Boat qualified CPOs.

They were crusty bastards who had done it all and had been forged into men who had been time tested over more years than a lot of us had time on the planet.

The ones I remember wore hydraulic oil stained hats with scratched and dinged-up insignia, faded shirts, some with a Bull Durham tag dangling out of their right-hand pocket or a pipe and tobacco reloads in a worn leather pouch in their hip pockets, and a Zippo that had been everywhere.

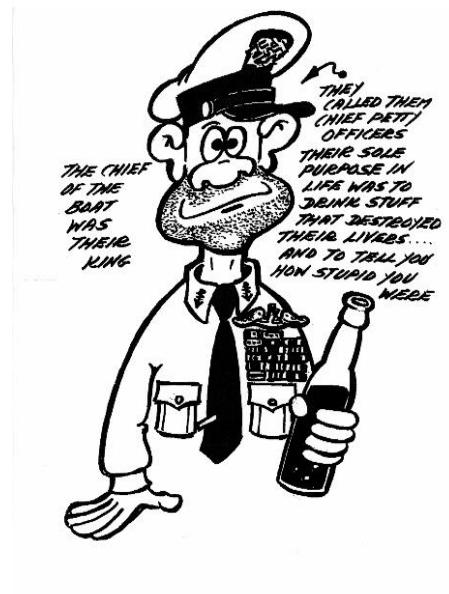
Some of them came with tattoos on their forearms that would force them to keep their cuffs buttoned at a Methodist picnic. Most of them were as tough as a boarding house steak... A quality required to survive the life they lived. They were and always will be, a breed apart from all other residents of Mother Earth.

They took eighteen year-old idiots and hammered the stupid bastards into submarine sailors. You knew instinctively it had to be hell on earth to have been born a Chief's kid... God should have given all sons born to Chiefs a return option.

A Chief didn't have to command respect... He got it because there was nothing else you could give them. They were God's designated hitters on earth.

We had Chiefs with fully loaded Submarine Combat Patrol Pins in my day... Hardcore bastards, who found nothing out of place with the use of the word 'Japs' to refer to the little sons of Nippon they had littered the floor of the Pacific with, as payback for a little December 7th tea party they gave us in 1941. In those days, 'insensitivity' was not a word in a boatsailor's lexicon. They remembered lost mates and still cursed the cause of their loss... And they were expert at choosing descriptive adjectives and nouns, none of which their mothers would have endorsed.

At the rare times you saw a Chief topside in dress canvas, you saw rows of hard-earned worn and faded ribbons over his pocket.



"Hey Chief, what's that one and that one?"

"Oh Hell kid, I can't remember. There was a war on. They gave them to us to keep track of the campaigns. We didn't get a lot of news out where we were. To be honest, we just took their word for it. Hell son, you couldn't pronounce most of the names of the places we went... They're all depth charge survival geedunk. Listen kid, ribbons don't make you a submariner... We *knew* who the heroes were and in the final analysis that's all that matters."

Many nights we sat in the after battery messdeck wrapping ourselves around cups of coffee and listening to their stories. They were lighthearted stories about warm beer shared with their running mates in corrugated metal sheds at resupply depots, where the only furniture was a few packing crates and a couple of Coleman lamps... Standing in line at a Honolulu cathouse or spending three hours soaking in a tub in Freemantle, smoking cigars and getting loaded. It was our history... And we dreamed of being just like them because they were our heroes.

When they accepted you as their shipmate, it was the highest honor you would ever receive in your life... At least it was clearly that for me.

They were not men given to the perogatives of their position. You would find them with their sleeves rolled up, shoulder-to-shoulder with you in a stores loading party.

"Hey Chief, no need for you to be out here tossin' crates in the rain, we can get all this crap aboard."

"Son, the term '*All hands*' means all hands."

"Yeah Chief, but you're no damn kid anymore, you old coot."

"Horsefly, when I'm eighty-five parked in the stove up old bastards' home, I'll still be able to kick your worthless butt from here to fifty feet past the screwguards along with six of your closest friends."

And he probably wasn't bullshitting.

They trained us. Not only us, but hundreds more just like us. If it wasn't for Chief Petty Officers, there wouldn't be any Submarine Force.

There wasn't any fairy godmother who lived in a hollow tree in the enchanted forest who could wave her magic wand and create a Chief Petty Officer. They were born as hotsacking seamen and matured like good whiskey in steel hulls over many years. Nothing a nineteen year-old jaybird could cook up was original to these old saltwater owls. They had seen E-3 jerks come and go for so many years, they could read you like a book.

"Son, I know what you are thinking. Just one word of advice... DON'T. It won't be worth it."

"Aye, Chief."

Chiefs aren't the kind of guys you thank. Monkeys at the zoo don't spend a lot of time thanking the guy who makes them do tricks for peanuts. Appreciation of what they did and who they were, comes with long distance retrospect... No young lad takes time to recognize the worth of his leadership. That comes later when you have experienced poor leadership or lets say, when you have the maturity to recognize what leaders should be, you find that submarine Chiefs are the standard by which you measure all others.

They had no Academy rings to get scratched up. They butchered the King's English. They had become educated at the other end of an anchor chain from Copenhagen to Singapore... They had given their entire lives to the United States Navy. In the progression of the nobility of employment, submarine CPO heads the list.

So, when we ultimately get our final duty station assignments and we get to wherever the big CNO in the sky assigns us... If we are lucky, Marines will be guarding the streets. I don't know about that Marine propaganda bullshit, but there will be an old Chief in a oil-stained hat and a cigar stub clenched in his teeth, standing at the brow to assign us our bunks and tell us where to stow our gear... And we will all be young again and the gahdam coffee will float a rock.

Life fixes it so that by the time a stupid kid grows old enough and smart enough to recognize who he should have thanked along the way, he no longer can. If I could, I would thank my old Chiefs... If you only knew what you succeeded in pounding in this thick skull, you would be amazed.

So thanks you old casehardened unsalvageable sonuvabitches... Save me a rack in the Alley.

Give the Boatservice Back Tradition by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Someday, the submarine force will find a leader who will have the insight to recognize the wisdom of returning a lot of the lighthearted tradition and give back some of the little things that meant so much to the old tattered foul weather jacket and raggedy dungaree force.

A good beginning would be to return the tradition of never pinning Dolphins on a dry shirt. It was a good tradition...Oh yes, I know the arguments against the tradition... Safety... Unecessary risk. In the world of grown men... Adult, red-blooded bluejackets, that rationale is pure bullshit. The foundation of all military service is risk... The

acceptance of risk in selfless service to one's nation. Tossing a lad into the ocean he lives in, involves minimal risk. Hell, strap a lifejacket on the lad. The honor of this baptismal ritual and the effect it had on a man's personal pride and his entry to ship's company and the fellowship of proven submariners, far outweighs the risk.

If you want boatsailors to reenlist... To remain for career service... You must give them back the cocky pride that once was ingrained in the men who wore cloth Dolphins just above the cuff of their right sleeve.

That can be done... It would take one hell of a force commander but it could be done.

First, de-emphasize all the personal benefits of specialized training as enticements to retain boatsailors and instead emphasize the brotherhood of undersea service. Riding heavy steel under the sea is the common denominator... Being taken in to that brotherhood used to be all that mattered. Wearing 'twin fish' over your pocket meant that you measured up... They marked you as a man apart... An accepted part of a very elite Naval Force... They made you special.

In the old days before the wholesale proliferation of all the meaningless bullshit pocket hardware that the Department of Defense uses as bribes to make kids appear to be warriors... The golden calf icons of mediocrity that get handed out like Crackerjack prizes that mean nothing... The lads of today know in their hearts that they risked nothing, dared nothing and sacrificed nothing for 90% of the meaningless chest jewelry they wear. Quit treating men like children and handing out toy horsecrap. All that the men of yesterday required was the privilege of serving in submarines.

There is something wrong with a military force where peacetime junior enlisted personnel wear more ribbons than a field grade officer who fought from North Africa to the Rhine. It is a silent insult devised and perpetuated by small-bore command leadership to diminish the deeds of the giants of what Tom Brokaw has termed 'The Greatest Generation'. The desk bound public relation hacks have missed the mark. By inflating awards and turning American decorations to ticket punch milestones, everyone got shortchanged and brave men whose valor was rewarded with the decorations that have become travel souvenirs, got their pockets picked by the feather-merchants who piss on the tradition of hard men who rode armed ships in defense of what they believe in.

Let sailors go back to crushing wings in their goddam white hats. Who in God's name came up with that toilet bowl roll white hat crap? They ought to find them and hang all of them up by their heels.

I see ships returning from overseas deployment and the bluejackets lining the rail looking like the navy has parked bidets on everyone's head... Give the lads back that seagoing cocky crushed white hat... The one worn by men that threw heavy ordinance, went in harms' way and won wars.

The world once witnessed proud American sailors rolling down streets in foreign ports with white hats rakishly cocked over one eye with a set of characteristic port and starboard wings... His wallet clamshelled in his waistband and his pack of Luckies tucked in his sock.

The brass will puff themselves up like a mating barn owl and say,

"The United States Naval uniform is not meant to be a vehicle for personal expression and individual affectation."

Horseshit.

It used to be. It set us apart from the chickenshit regulation of the other robot handpuppet forces. Sailors never took a pee by the numbers or spent a whole helluva lot of time memorizing Rockettes routines. It was a force of extremely proud, highly competent individuals who took pride in buying tailormades and looking like a damn sailor was supposed to look.

You've gotta ease up on the lads today... Give them back that means of self identification. The poor bastards look like some toy manufacturers idea of what a sailor should look like or what some fashion designers imagined our navy should be wearing. Navy leadership should remove anyone from influencing naval uniforms who never woke up in a stretched canvas rack six hundred plus nautical miles from the nearest deep water port. Any idiot who never wore snug-nut skivvies and thirteen-button bell bottoms shouldn't be allowed within ten miles of any decision on raghat uniforms.

Next, you must reconnect present-day submarine sailors with their heritage. I have talked with a number of lads riding today's technological marvels. Most of them feel no connection with any non-uranium powered submersible.

We were fortunate. We shared mess tables with the boatsailors who rode boats under Lockwood, skippered by the meateaters that destroyed more enemy ships than any American sub sailors before... Or since. They handed us our heritage... Our birthright as submarine sailors. In those days heritage was passed from the barnacle encrusted bastards to the next generation in sea stories told over coffee.

That can't be done today...

The old 'Dead air and seven knot submerged' bastards are gone. There are no more pre E-8 and E-9 red hashmark Chiefs... No guys who listened to fifty pound TNT packages detonate and bust up crockery, gauge faces and hull packing. They are history... Rickover relegated the sonuvabitches to the pier dumpster for obsolete gear.

I know that the lads who make up the crews of those two hundred yard, high speed automated undersea luxury liners look on smokeboat sailors as Neanderthal relics, but like it or not, they are downline links in the hundred year chain of submarine history.

Some submarine force commander is going to wake up one day and have the spiritual revelation required to give our submarine history to our fine sailors of today. You say,

"How in hell could THAT be accomplished?"

Simple really... The History of the force exists in books... Film... Logs, records, diaries and in the graying heads of the men who lived it. The men whose deeds gave us our proud legacy.

With minimal expenditure and use of limited manpower resources, the United States Submarine Force could prepare a series of underway lectures... After chow... Talks to be read by junior officers when the boat is underway. A gentleman by the name of Theodore Roscoe wrote a book about *Submarine Operations of World War II*. Simply reading from that book would connect today's submariners to a very important part... The most important era in our history. The book should be a part of every boat's library the day she's launched. They spend zillions on subs, so a fifty to sixty dollar book that can be obtained from The U.S. Naval Institute in Annapolis shouldn't knock a helluva dent in the developmental piggy bank... The return on investment would be measured in improved pride, elevated morale and warrior spirit.

We diesel boat sailors had little or nothing in comparison to today's crew comforts taken for granted by today's submariners. But we had deep pride in what we were a part of. We didn't share our boats with follow-on crews. We were the boat. We owned our hull number... Every bolt, rivet and packing gland... And every rust stain that ran down our superstructure.

Let us pray that some saltwater admiral turns up someday with a set of deep submergence cajones and sends the word to every boat in the force to the effect that all this Top Gun, Navy SEAL horseshit is about to take a backseat to the tough seagoing bastards that make up the community of undersea sharks. He is going to elevate the visibility of the U.S. Submariner to the point where eight-year old boys want to grow up and get on a bus to New London.

Hey, I'm just an old worn-out E-3. Nobody in possession of his right mind would listen to an After Battery Rat... But if I was SUBPAC or SUBLANT, I would (a) find out what Art Smith, Ron "Warshot" Smith, Roy Ator and Capt. Slade Cutter eat for breakfast and serve it every morning and (b) I would buy Tommy Cox and Bobby Reeds's 'Brothers of The Dolphin' CD and play the damn thing every morning on every boat in the fleet until every lad knew the words by heart... And could sing it in any bar on the globe. And I would play that song at 0600 every morning at New London at a decibel level over outdoor speakers that would knock every sonuvabitch at the Coast Guard Academy out of his rack. Hell, I would have noise pollution guys from the E.P.A. skydiving on the base with tiger nets.

That is one of the many reasons that the people up forward rarely sought advice from idiots aft.

But seriously... The boatservice became a dysfunctional family when Rickover's boys started considering the gravel gut service to be 'The other side of the tracks'. Officers never saw that, but we sure as hell did.

We can change that... All we have to do is do what raghats do best. Look on each other as shipmates and take back our deeply meaningful history and tradition that link us in the tightest brotherhood ever created. If you wore Dolphins 'once upon a time', then join the United States Submarine Veterans, Inc. (click on the link) and show your support for the lads riding steel ships under the sea in selfless sacrifice in defense of this fine nation.

They are our legacy.

The Great 'Ska-Loosh' Locker by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Adrian Stuke created the concept... He didn't invent the idea.

Sailors had been aware of how it worked since before Noah discovered positive buoyancy. What Stuke did was define it and explain the rules.

First, all bodies of saltwater throughout the entire world became known as the 'Ska-Loosh' locker. Only E-3s were allowed to use the term or employ the concept. If you continued either one after making third class, the *Goddess of the Main Induction* would give you a rare form of venereal disease, where your dick would turn green and fall off.

Anything tossed in the Ska-Loosh locker was gone for good.

For example, we once had a Chief of the Boat that was slightly enamored with his own sense of importance and had been given power derived from a direct relationship with Satan and every other rotten sonuvabitch in Hell.

One day, this paragon of virtue and naval leadership, assembled the Requin deck force and delivered to us a pneumatic three-prong scaler, known in professional E-3 circles as 'a frigging knucklebuster'.

Any idiot who has spent more than three months on an operating smokeboat, knows that the last thing you want to use on the pressure hull or attached superstructure is a contraption that makes noise like dental work being done on the tin man. You light off a three-prong knucklebuster and start it pounding away in the vicinity of the *Kingdom of the Wardroom* during the after chow siesta of the *King and his Court*, and you will know the wrath and displeasure of the disturbed.

There was nothing worthwhile you could do with a pneumatic scaler that would not make you the focal point of mass displeasure.

So we held a tribal council of the policy makers of the E-3 community... The Wizards of Pier 22. We decided that the best place for this creation of the Devil was the 'Ska-loosh' locker. Someone mentioned that the COB had signed for it and would be held accountable if it was misplaced... An added bonus that confirmed the brilliance of our decision.

There was stuff known in our day as 'Title B' gear. I have no idea what 'Title B' meant, but if you lost it, the United States Navy made your life hell and you could wind up buying something you never knew the exact location of. I once bought a set of 7x50 binoculars. I didn't know their exact location, but I knew it was a helluva lot closer to the Titanic than we were because when I cleared the bridge, the strap popped and it did a Briar Rabbit leap... Hit the tanktops and made it's way to what I assumed to be the bargain basement of the North Atlantic... *The Great World-Wide Ska-Loosh Locker.*

Well, that's where we deposited that thirty-pound pneumatic knucklebuster. The sonuvabitch did a triple flip forward of the starboard screw guard and made the obligatory 'Ska-Loosh', then made it's way to join ten million coffee cups, chipping hammers, paint scrapers, and assorted naval inventory, previously E-3 float-tested and certified 'negatively buoyant' for test purposes.

Take a busted Fairbanks piston destined for the scrap metal dumpster. We applied E-3 logic and our calculations... A determination even Admiral Rickover could not have disputed... Our calculations showed conclusively that it was one hundred yards plus to the dumpster and less than ten feet from the After Battery hatch to the Adrian Stuke designated Ska-Loosh Locker.

At 0200 we float-tested the worthless sonuvabitch.

The sea bed between Pier 22 and Pier 23 must have had the appearance of a New Jersey junkyard... A naval archeological treasure trove of assorted useless metal crap going back to the original stuff Noah's leading seaman float-tested... Big rock anchors and a dead camel... Maybe two... Dinosaur bones... Jonah's boot... All kinds of worthless, discarded bullshit.

The Elizabeth River will never become a source for bottled spring water. Mankind will be sipping the contents of Pakistani septic tanks through a straw before any sonuvabitch ever gets stupid enough to take a drink from the Elizabeth River... You could percolate iguana crap and get something one helluva lot better than anything passing Des Sub piers.

With that in mind, we could be fairly certain that the evidence of our transgressions would remain undiscovered until two days after Judgment Day, when all E-3s will have their sins either forgiven or vacated for lack of DNA evidence.

According to Adrian Stuke, who was an expert on all things related to saltwater disposal, there were magical powers at work in the Ska-Loosh locker.

Stuke had a theory. After you pulled in and the boat was secured, the skipper cleared with the Squadron and returned to the boat. Shortly after his return, the COB would come on the 21MC,

"All hands... Section three has the duty... Liberty commencing for sections one and two."

This had the same effect as opening the front door deadbolt for freebie night at the local cathouse... Folks took off like they were shot out of a cannon.

"Section three will throw in a top-off charge on the batteries before turning in. Topside watch and below decks watches will assume normal relief assignments. I repeat, liberty commencing for sections one and two."

Once all the homeward-bound liberty hounds had answered the starting pistol, one of the animals would take a trip up to the pay phone at the head of the pier. He would place a call and within thirty minutes, two six packs of cold beer would arrive in a light blue '57 Chevy, to be retrieved by the duty guardmail runner in his big leather mail bag.

Once the charge was completed, those not hauling for the rack immediately would gather at the after capstan, down a couple of cold ones and deposit their cans in an old ratty laundry bag or GDU bag, equipped with the appropriate weight. When all the nocturnal communicants had partaken, all cans were deposited into the Ska-Loosh locker.

"Hey Stuke-man... What if they caught on to what we're pulling off and sent some diver down. Man, they would light us on fire for drinking aboard ship."

"Hell Dex, they wouldn't find anything. The *Goddess of the Main Induction* is in charge of the Ska-Loosh locker and she details a mermaid to catch that crap before it hits bottom and haul it over to the Destroyer Piers."

Made perfect sense to me.

Dolphins and Some Obligations that Came With Them by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The day when those bastards with the unshaven smiling faces hung from the limber holes aft of the forward engine room exhaust, hauled your dripping wet, worthless butt up the tanktops, and the Old Man pinned Dolphins over the pocket of your wet dungaree shirt... Your life changed.

You had no idea how that piece of silver-plated metal would alter the world you would live in.

All civilizations have their milestones. In some African tribes they pin all sorts of hell on prospective 'Qualified' warriors... The poor bastards have to tapdance barefooted over a hundred yards white hot rocks... Wear a hornet's nest like a hat, kill a panther with their bare hands and have a witch doctor stitch their scrotum to their knee with a wild boar tusk. Then, after a three-day dance with his drunk as owls buddies, the lad becomes a warrior... Which means he's eligible to kill and eat his enemies and become the Secretary General of United Nations.

I think it is called 'the rite of passage.' Having your skipper pin Dolphins on you is such a rite and it brought with it a set of unrecorded obligations that you didn't fully understand and obligations you knew nothing about at the time. Hell, you could fill all the planets and the Australian outback with the stuff nineteen-year-old non-rated kids didn't know.

First, the unwritten law requires that you never pass up a lad hitchhiking wearing silver fish... You can be flank haulin' up the highway, ten guys packed in a VW bug... And you'll burn flat spots in your tires to pack one more boatsailor in. Why? Because he's a damn submarine sailor. If you pass up a sub sailor the Goddess of The Main induction visits you in your sleep and removes two of your indispensable major internal organs with a rusty electricians knife. Never, ever pass up a man wearing Dolphins... Tape the bastard to a fender if you have to... But never pass on by a qualified boat sailor.

Never leave a boatsailor sitting in a gin mill broke and nursing an empty glass. Tuck a five in his pocket... Buy the bastard a beer and have the barmaid take his wallet... Total the monetary contents which should be a short heavie toss to zero... Make a note on a bar tab for you to give his topside watch... Poke his I.D. and liberty card in his jumper pocket... Pour him in a cab when it arrives (mark cab license on note for his Topside Watch)... Pay and tip the driver and tell him to haul him to Pier 22 and get the Topside Watch to get him assistance to his rack. Why do you do this? It was called 'Bluejacket drunk insurance'. Idiots taking care of their fellow idiots. The non-rated man's 'Law of the Sea'.

Sailors have always taken care of sailors. When you get down to the lowest common denominator in sea service and what you have are guys who only have each other and nowhere is that more in evidence than with the men who ride submarines.

Take onboard illness at sea. Submarines don't carry doctors... They carry the most outstanding and highly qualified independent paramedics found anywhere. An independent duty corpsman is as good a doctor and follow-up practitioner as you will find anywhere you go. And, they were some of the most dedicated rascals on the planet. No man, in the submarine biz was doing it for what little extra they got paid... And Corpsman sure as hell weren't. What idiot in his right mind would lance butt boils in a state five sea for an extra five bucks a day? And an obligation that came with Dolphins required you to help doc with your sick mates so he can get the rest he needs to take care of what tomorrow may hand him.

"Hey Jack... Jack... Wake up you goldbrickin' bastard."

"Yeah, whatcha need?"

"Doc said to wake you up at twenty-three hundred and getcha' to swallow this gahdam horse pill."

"Okay... Hand it to me."

"Not so fast... I gotta see you swallow the sonuvabitch. Doc made me promise... Said if I let you pull an eye-woolie on me, the Goddess of the Dry Stores Room would piss in my Post toasties."

"Got water?"

"Naw... Cup of orange juice."

"Thanks... I owe you one."

"Oh, damn near forgot. Doc has the Below Decks Watch lined up to take your temperature when he racks out the mid watch... If you are running 102° or better he's supposed to bust Doc out of the rack."

"Thanks... I still feel lousy."

"You look lousy... Hey, I'm gonna swing up in that tip bunk under the return ventilation line. If you need anything, Horsefly, just poke me... Okay? That's no bullshit."

It all came with Dolphins. And sooner or later, you paid some serious dues.

"Hey Dex."

"Yo!"

"There are a couple of airdales giving some half-loaded First Class off the Argonaut a tough time."

"Whatcha mean, tough time?"

"I think they are just about to deck him."

"So?"

"So, he's a gahdam boatsailor, Horsefly... We're not gonna let those bird farm idiots work him over, without making them pay."

"Did you take a good look at'em?"

"Yeah... Big guys, huh?"

"Big, are you kidding? The last time I saw anything as big as that Aviation Machinist Mate, it was wearing horseshoes and pulling the Budweiser wagon."

Dolphins required you to sacrifice a set of whites and up to a pint of blood to extract a fellow idiot from a perilous situation... Usually of his own making. That old Three Musketeer, "One for all and all for one" thing. It was an insurance policy that insured that one of your Dolphin-wearing buddies would drag your bloody carcass out of the bullring after the main event... And verify and endorse, in his role as incident witness, the accuracy and veracity of the explanatory horseshit you had custom fabricated for your duty officer.

Dolphins were serious juju... Bigtime 'Get out of jail free' cards.

In 1962, I was sent to the reassignment section at the NOB (Naval Operating Base) receiving station after they cut my appendix out. The next morning I reported to the assigned muster location outside the main entrance of J-50. I had been told that the Chief who assigned the daily 'in transit' work details was a first-rate hard ass... A kind of shore duty volcanic maniac. I also knew that Chief Petty Officers were allowed to kill up to three E-3s a month and sell their hides to itinerate nomads who lived in the paint lockers of rusty merchant ships.

When we formed up, his majesty appeared. He looked the part... Built like a Sherman tank. He had fists that could have squeezed ink out of a bowling ball.

"Listen up... Gahdammit, knock off the grab ass and listen up! My name is (whatever in the hell his name was)... I'm a gahdam Gunners Mate and I don't have the time or inclination to put up with wiseass remarks or idiot jerks who try to get past the system rules. You don't want to screw with me, because I will take you apart like a cheap watch. AM I UNDERSTOOD?"

"Aye, Chief."

"Hey you... YOU! Yeah, you the torpedoman striker... You stand fast after the rest of these clowns march off to rake leaves."

He issued rakes and assignments and marched them off. Then he looked at me and I noticed he was qualified.

"You trying to get back to your boat?"

"Damn straight, Chief."

"I'll square it away... Now get lost. Do whatever in the hell you want to but don't commit a major crime or get loaded before 1630."

Dolphins are some powerful things... At least they used to be. Every prostitute knew that they meant \$125.00 a month and S&FD (sea and foreign duty) pay and that worked a little magic. Green boots asked you a million questions... Old subvets bought you drinks... And other members of the fraternity throughout the naval establishment greased skids, untangled red tape and took care of you.

And when you grew old, the crazy bastards came and found you and brought you back to the tribal gathering... To sit next to the fire... Drink the fermented sprits and tell lies until late in the night and recall days long ago when lads with silver pocket fish roamed the oceans of the world... Pissed against the wind and only had each other.

It Was Home by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

"Hey below!"

"Down ladder!"

"Down ladder!"

"Down ladder!"

Followed by three thumps in the after battery passageway heralding the return of three non-rated fools from a night of post pay day wanton revelry and self-destruction.

"Well ladies, you missed the fun tonight. There was a floor show at Bells... Some guy off the Redfin rearranged some IC Electrician's nose cartilage and we all got a nipple peek off Dixie for a three-buck tip. Great night in the big city gentlemen. Another wonderful day in Arliegh Burke's Seagoing Funhouse."

"Knock it off! Jeezus, you gahdam kids get wrapped around two damn beers and you start auditioning for the Obnoxious Loudmouth of the Month."

"Oh, listen to Mr. Grumpy, the sour-faced sailor. Hello Mr. Grumpy... What did you do tonight? Did you do your homework for your Chief's exam, like a good Mr. Grumpy the Lifer, Den Mother and Keeper of Mature Thoughts and Wisdom?"

"God deliver the US Navy from nineteen year-old two-beer bandit jerks... Little frigging idiots who come smokestackin' down the pier at midnight, waking up working sailors."

"Working sailors? Jack, c'mon you're talking to guys that know you... Guys who know that you had your last productive day line handling for Noah. Hell, you should wear a

mask and point a gun at the guy who gives you your navy paycheck, the way you rob the gahdam navy."

"Hey, when you silly children decide to quit waking people up and making asses of yourselves, make sure your gahdam shoes aren't sitting in the passageway."

"Yes, mother."

"Night-night, mother dear."

"Night-night sweetheart."

"Hey, Stuke... Wanna make a break out and have some steak & eggs?"

"Sounds like a helluva good idea."

The boats had 'open galley', which meant any man could fix himself chow at times he would not interfere with a cook preparing a meal. The big catch was, if you didn't leave the galley as clean as you found it, the cook would kill you and drape your guts over an operating vent handle in the crews mess as a warning.

"Evening, Mr. Schilling."

"You have the duty, sir?"

"You guessed it. And let me guess... You gentlemen have been ashore spreading good will to the patrons and fair maidens at Bells, the establishment of refined companionship, like the good naval ambassadors you are... Am I right?"

"Mr. Schilling... Sir, can you still be one of those goodwill navy ambassador whatcha-callits if you peed on Hampton Boulevard and your running mate heaved up three boiled eggs and six Slim-Jims on the Cubera's tanktops?"

"No, I don't think so... I think at some point you go from naval goodwill ambassador to E-3 idiots, with drunk in tow."

"You want steak and eggs, sir?"

"No gentlemen, think I'll pass... Goin' forward and turn in. We're gonna be bustin' out line handlers about 0530... Night lads."

"Night, sir."

"Night, sir."

"Night Mr. Schilling."

"Hey, you know Mr. Schilling's an okay guy."

"That's because he was a raghat. I heard he left neckerchiefs in places the heavyweight champ wouldn't go... And had to carry a gahdam ball bat to beat goodlookin' wimmin off him."

"That's no shit, Hawkeye. Mr. Schilling sure attracts goodlooking ladies. I brought my girl aboard one afternoon and Mr. Schilling was standin' on deck up by the JT soundhead and Trixie said..."Oh who's that?"

"Who's who?"

"That good looking man up there."

"Oh... That's Mr. Schilling, the very happily married OPS Officer and our religious guidance confessor."

"Noel K. Schilling ... Great guy, but man he can light your ass up like a Fourth of July picnic if you screw up on his watch... He forgot more stuff about the submarines than most officers will ever know."

"Hey, knock off the bullshit. Who's doing the eggs? I'm doin' the steaks."

"If I do'em you'd better like'em scrambled... Did anybody check with the Below Decks Watch and Topside Watch to see if they want any?"

"Peto has the Topside Watch and somebody gave the sonuvabitch half a stale pizza so he's in heaven and Butter Bean has the Below Decks and that sonuvabitch will eat anything, any time, so toss another steak on for him."

"Hey below."

"Yo..."

"Got a walkin' wounded boatsailor up here... Need someone to lend a hand getting him below."

"Who is it?"

"John T... And he's carrying a package... Crocked to the gills."

" Get him to the after battery hatch and we'll take him from there."

"Owe you one..."

"What's this 'owe you one stuff'? Andy, John T. is crew. Someday horsefly, he'll haul you back... That's what boatsailors do for boatsailors. Nobody ever owes anybody anything... Get that through your thick head. Now get his damn feet on the first ladder rung."

"Hey John... John?"

"Yeah son? Whatcha need?"

"Gotta getcha down, babe."

"I'ma li'l under the weather, son... Li'l bent outta shape."

"It's okay, just don't run your leg through the ladder... You're doin' great."

"No... I know... I'm really shot up... Carryin' a cargo."

"John... It's okay. Take it easy. We're gonna pop you in this rack. Can you handle a cup of coffee?"

"Nah... Got a jug hidden out."

"John you don't need a drink... Take my word for it."

"Hey! Your damn steak is getting cold."

"Let's get wrapped around this steak... Clean up and square away the galley. Remember, Mr. Schilling said they would be racking out linehandlers at 0530 and that's us."

And it was all long ago. The faces and names you never forgot, just a Saturday night with the boys.

I have always felt sorry for guys who hated their military service... You know, the guy who served in the Ohio Guard and was a file clerk at Camp Donald Duck next to a town of 150 in Arkansas. Poor bastard... Stupid sonuvabitch could have volunteered for the boats. Stale air... Stench... Hotsacking.... Cockroaches... Acid-eaten dungarees... No sunshine for long periods and crazy bastards taking care of each other.

For a lifetime.

The Smokeboat Navy by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

During one of those 'Big Cheese' visits... You know, when the Chief of the Boat made the announcements for the day and said,

"At 1300, we've got a big cheese coming aboard... COM 'pain-in-the-ass' LANT. By 1245, I want all you jaybirds topside in dress canvas... Any questions?"

So by 1300, there we were. Two lines of idiots aft of the fairwater, waiting for some overpaid member of the 'I ain't been to sea in ten years' naval nobility to come down the line and ask some poor, yet to be determined, sonuvabitch the obligatory questions.

"Where you from, son?"

"Dead Dog, Arkansas, sir."

"Good town... Went through there in '56."

Most likely high level of bullshit, but nobody cared.

Some top-heavy cheese with more stars than a dark night, stopped in front of Adrian Stuke.

"What'z yer name, son?"

"Adiran Stuke, sir."

"Where ya from?"

"Quincy Illinois, sir."

"You like the navy?"

"No sir... Hate the chicken shit, uniform-of-the-day navy... That's why I joined the sub force, sir."

That about summed it up for all of us. Every Thanksgiving, the thing I am truly most grateful for is that God did whatever it was that he did that kept me out of the regulation, horseshit surface craft, uniform-of-the-day, write you up navy. The navy that was overly concerned with stuff like all of the stencils in every part of your uniform being the same name. Since clean white hat theft was a sub service practical factor and 'lucky bag workin' uniform' was always the 'Uniform of the Day' known as Raggedy Andy issue, we found ourselves causing sparks and smoke to come out of Bosun Mates' ears.

To say that the lads who rode smokeboats didn't care about the regulation navy isn't true. We were glad they were there. We were proud of them and wished them all the happiness in the world...we were just damn glad we weren't a part of it. The little periodic taste we got of surface navy life on trips to the tender was more than enough.

The surface navy felt the same way... They treated us like you would treat a bunch of old guys who went around with their fly open and scratching their butts all the time.

Once SUBLANT wanted to take a photo of a couple of brand new whiz bang nuke boats... A pair of low-mileage boats with hull numbers with still wet paint.

They made an entire nest of nasty-looking diesel boats shift berths to the outboard side of the tender to keep the photo nice and neat. You know, like your mom sweeping the dirt under the rug and sticking her dirty dishes in the oven when your Aunt Tilly came for a visit. Like moving skid row out of town during the State Fair.

I know that they make the flat-chested cheerleaders stand in the back row for the yearbook picture but they don't make 'em go hide in the woods. Once the nuclear navy showed up, we all got to know what the plain looking gals in Dolly Parton's class felt like. We didn't care... In my day, there was still enough of the poor white trash smokeboat navy left that we sure as hell didn't get lonely and Hyman Rickover acted like he didn't know we were there and that had to be a blessing from God.

The Naval Supply operated under the assumption that if ninety-year-old hookers no longer needed tampons, twenty-year-old diesel submarines must no longer need hatch gaskets. So we cannibalized, stole and made do to keep 'em seagoing. We have no history because the navy just stuck our worthless butts out of sight... Outboard the tender and pretended we didn't exist... Except for ping-time targets and crappy North Atlantic response trigger decoys.

Being ignored has its positive advantages, though. Not being the focal point of attention, allows you to pee on the tank tops, steal heaving lines, wear acid-eaten dungarees and hydraulic oil-soaked raghats topside... And form committees of tit evaluators topside to pass judgment on every set of knockers that walked down the pier. It allowed you to adopt the lighthearted attitude of the free spirit and the freedom to apply methods beyond the restrictive boundaries of prescribed regulation to get the job done. And, it went a long way to form the lifetime bonds of being a part of what is now known as 'the submarine community'.

I don't know what it felt like to have been a member of the brotherhood of pirates, but it had to have felt something like being a fully inducted member of crab can community... The seagoing society of swashbuckling smokeboat sonuvabitches..

I loved it... Wouldn't have had it any other way. You name any other military outfit where you could have spent six years needing a haircut with your shirt-tail hanging out and still be known as 'the elite of the fleet'... A service where a kid saw your Dolphins when you were trying to sleep on a Greyhound bus and woke you up to ask you what it was like to ride the boats... A service where old long ago bluejackets called the waitress over and said,

"Hey sweetheart... You see that kid at the counter with the silver pin over his pocket? I know what the crazy sonuvabitch does for a living... Put his breakfast on my tab and bring me my check."

All of us were blessed. We got to ride the boats that left the American people the unmatched record of World War II enemy maritime destruction. We bunked in the same bunks as the guys who filled shiploads of Jap sailors with saltwater and packed 'em off to hell with Mark Fourteens. Could there possibly be anything better than that?

Sure, we ragged the nukes... We knew that John Wayne would never star in a movie as a nuke skipper... Neither would Cary Grant, Clark Gable or Burt Lancaster... They were raggedy-ass diesel boat sailors. Hey, the nuclear force was the future... It had its history to make... We were history. Our boats were all waiting for their appointments with the scrap yard, like cattle in line at the slaughterhouse door.

The national memory of this nation is all of fifteen minutes long. Boats that had returned in triumph in 1945 to a welcoming and grateful nation, died slowly... Unheralded, unnoticed... Silently cut up out of sight. Today, with the exception of a few boats slowly oxidizing on display for the public and a few being kept alive by artificial means by foreign navies, they are only names and hull numbers on the list of stricken naval vessels. They are gone and only kept alive in the memories of those of us who had the good fortune to ride those wonderful old girls. Men who will grow old remembering rolling decks... Some of God's finest sunsets... The sound of a creaking pressure hull and the forgotten art of jackassing fuel hoses down a pier loaded with 'gear adrift' crap.

And their Dolphins will grow tarnished in a dark corner of their cufflink boxes.

O'Bryan, the Yeo by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Every boat had one. Some good, some lousy but we had one of the all-time great ones.

Before we got O'Bryan, we had a kid who wasn't a big league player... He was the kinda guy who spends twenty minutes matching his necktie with his exposed pocket-handkerchief and his socks. You could have boiled him for three days and he wouldn't have made a good bowl of soup for a sick man.

I don't know where the skipper found him, but O'Bryan was a kind of cross between Jesse James and Sgt. Bilko. He was wired with SUBLANT and the Squadron, could get anything done and lay his hands on anything. He covered the entire crew's ass like a concrete diaper. If they came any better, they musta' been working for the CNO.

Yeomen work in the wardroom and hear everything. The officers make them swear the oath that Catholic priests, honest stockbrokers and gynecologists have to take, not to talk about stuff they see or hear in the course of their professional duties. (You ever wonder what gynecologists talk about after work over beers? "Hey, Jack... You wouldn't believe what I got a close-up look at today.")

O'Bryan never talked, but the Rats in the Alley could learn a lot by just watching him.

For instance... Once we knew the Old Man had gone up to the Squadron and knew where we were going, if O'Bryan hauled his blues home and returned with starched and pressed whites and one of those tropical shirts with parrots and gardenias all over it, we were heading South. Conversely, if the smiling sonuvabitch came back lugging his Nanook of the North, triple grizzly hide foulweather jacket, we knew it wouldn't be long until the Quartermasters would be up in Squadron OPS, pulling charts for locations in the direction of Iceland.

On some boats, they called their Yeoman the 'Yeomanette' or 'Titless Wave'... Not on Requin. Something instinctively told you that the first time some stupid sonuvabitch called O'Bryan a 'Titless Wave', the next thing the poor dumb sonuvabitch would know, he'd be thirty feet up a rhinoceros' colon, standing port and starboard watches.

O'Bryan knew all the mystic goodies, secret signs and was some kind of fraternal blood brother with Chief Webber, the Grand High Wizard of Subron Six. O'Bryan had the kind of connections that could get boats moved around in the nest and get ships' plaques made in the tender foundry.

When the Yeo told you to haul a ½ case of Peter Pan up to some jaybird in the optical shop on Orion, you knew exactly where the skipper's new 7x50 binoculars came from.

Once, Stuke and I had to take a 20 lb can of coffee up to Webber. Two day's later, an asshole Third Class cook who had just been aboard three months, suddenly got orders to a school boat in New London.

At chow one night, some ships' company jaybird said,

"Jeezus, I'm beginning to believe there is a God... What a miracle to get rid of that sonuvabitch."

O'Bryan laughed, wiped his mouth with his napkin and gave us his 'Cat that had just swallowed the canary look' smile and said,

"Not exactly a divine miracle, gentlemen... I was up in the Squadron Office the other day and Webber said, "What would a sonuvabitch have to do to get a 20 lb. can of Maxwell House sea stores off you bastards?"

"Remember that can of coffee the idiot twins hauled up to the Squadron Office? Well children, there was a direct relationship between 20 lbs of coffee and a recently packed seabag."

From that point on, I knew that if I pissed off O'Bryan I would probably spend the rest of my submarine career making free assents from the escape trunk in the bottom of the sewage plant in New Deli.

O'Bryan was a master basket leave magician.

For the uninitiated, 'Basket leave' is a slight of hand operation where a bluejacket fills out the appropriate paperwork for officially authorized leave. He then goes on leave... The Yeoman leaves these signed and authorized papers, lying dormant and 'Waiting to be processed' in his 'IN' box (hence the term 'basket leave'). If the bluejacket goes on leave and returns okay, the Yeo simply rips the leave authorization papers up and the lad doesn't lose any of his leave.

If the lad goes home and gets in a wreck and winds up in his hometown hospital, the Yeo processes the papers so the fellow will be covered.

A good Yeoman could not be influenced to do this. He did it to cover lads who went home to visit a sick parent, or his kid sister getting married or to bury his dear grandmother. O'Bryan made sure that damn near all of us got paid for the max leave you could carry on the books when we mustered out.

Prior to calling a kid up for any disciplinary action, the Old Man called up the COB (Chief of the Boat) and O'Bryan asked them if there was anything he should know. O'Bryan would say,

"Sir, he's a good lad. The kid is pulling a \$50.00 a payday allotment for a kid sister's nursing school tuition and he volunteers for every blood drive on the Tender."

This info could get you off with only a paint-blistering lecture.

O'Bryan's ability to influence the outcome of damn near everything was well known and respected aboard ship. We had lads that believed he could do anything. O'Bryan once won an anchor pool and the COB announced the winner over the IMC... Some cook striker stuck his head out of the galley and yelled,

"Jeezus, O'Bryan's figgered out how to jigger the damn anchor pool... That sonuvabitch can do anything."

That might be the greatest compliment the rascal ever got... And a pretty damn accurate assessment of the extent of his 'now you see it, now you don't' abilities. My personal recollections of O'Bryan include a lot of good memories. He embodied all the qualities that set submarine sailors apart from your run of the mill bluejackets.

I was aboard one evening killing time, sitting in the messdeck listening to local Norfolk Radio on the RBO and having coffee and a smoke when O'Bryan passed by, heading to the After Battery.

'Whatcha' doin' Dex?"

"Gonna hang around topside tonight... Catch a little fresh air and listen to the radio."

"You want to go home with me and have a home cooked meal?"

If there is anyone out there that was an E-3, you can remember what the words 'home cooking' meant to you. Being an E-3 was like being a destitute orphan.

O'Bryan married a lady that really knew how to cook.

Yes, I remember the Yeoman. He was a one-man band. He handled your personnel records, pay record, medical record and was a fellow who could really grease the skids for damn near anything.

After the Navy jerked my appendix, I returned to the Squadron... I reported in. Chief Webber looked at me...

"You're Armstrong aren't you?"

"Yo, Chief!"

"Yeah, O'Bryan said you'd be turning up. He said for me to send your worthless ass back to Requin... He wouldn't want to ruin his reputation by sending you to another boat."

If you had a good Yeoman, he was a great source of intelligence for gags and bigtime pranks. The Yeoman and Radio Operators knew damn near everything that went on concerning the boat. We knew who got promoted and had babies many times before the person involved did.

O'Bryan was involved in one of the most memorable gags we ever pulled off on Requin.

We had this kid report aboard. He was a great kid. He wore himself out trying to please everybody. There wasn't any lousy rotten job on the boat this kid wouldn't volunteer for... Bust his butt getting it done... And then pop up smiling asking if there was anything else that needed doing. The kid was too damn good to be real, but he was.

We were short of cooks... We usually carried three. We were down to two. The kid volunteered to become a cook striker.

The cooks took him on and in time the little redheaded freckle-faced kid got to where he could run out a damn good meal... And his built-in sunshine personality made you forgive his goof-ups on his way to learning the cooks' trade. He was an always smiling clean-cut American kid... The best kind of lad this nation turns out.

There was a stainless steel splash panel behind the grill. The lad tucked a picture of his hometown sweetheart, in the slot above it.

All of us entered the Navy with an 'I will love you forever, darling' hometown sweetheart... 'Forever' rarely lasted a year.

Anyway, the lad had a photo of a little blonde in a Peter-Pan blouse... One of those high school wallet size photos that came in sheets of nine in your yearbook photo package. You cut them apart and gave them to everyone in your immediate family, relatives and all your forever friends. They were the photos that turned up in the bottom of a cigar box with your first drivers license, your draft card, Lettermans' Club card and the panties your senior prom date left in the glove compartment of your dad's car. When you found the photos, a voice in your head said,

"I remember the face... And those fantastic tits... But damn if I remember her name."

So much for forever friends.

One thing was certain... I married a girl who beat 'em all by a mile. My running mate Adrian Stuke is convinced she was blind at the time.

Where in the hell was I? Oh yes... The kid had this photo of a sweet little, bright-eyed girl wedged in the slot at the top of the splash panel.

Submarine sailors will go to great lengths to be a bunch of rotten bastards. There is a term in the boats called 'red-ass', sometimes known as a case of the 'pink pooper'. It meant 'getting to' a shipmate... 'Pissing him off'... Make him lose it. Only boatsailors can appreciate how entertaining that could be. You had to guard your reactions because your shipmates would set some of the most amazing 'red-ass' traps. Once you took the bait, the word 'red-ass' would get passed through the boat and every sonuvabitch and his running mate would turn up.

Well, one night when we were sitting around listening to our toenails grow and we came up with a great plan.

We recruited O'Bryan and we found out that the kid got a lot of letters from a Cindy Lou Peterson in Hialeah, Florida... She lived at such and such a number on Doo-Dah Avenue.

We had an Engineman known as Bobby Ray Knight. Bobby Ray was one tough rascal. A Texan...the kind of a guy who would hunt grizzly bears with a claw hammer...but he had a great sense of humor. So we briefed Bobby Ray on all the details we had gotten from O'Bryan.

Then one night when the kid was working the evening meal, Bobby Ray looked in the Galley and pointed at the photo and said in loud voice,

"Is that Cindy Lou Peterson?"

And the kids face lit up...

"It sure is... You know her?"

"Does she live on Doo-Dah Avenue in Hialeah, Florida?"

"That's her!"

"Hell yes, I know her... Her and her mother used to work the Phillips 66 Truck Stop out on Route #1... They were a mother-daughter hooking team... I've had 'em both."

Before Bobby Ray had finished, the kid was halfway through that little window where they passed out the food... Swinging the GDU wrench... It had to be the funniest moment in our red-ass goat roping.

After that, the kid was a solid part of ships' company. A year later, his forever love's photo was just a memory and the kid was running with a barmaid who was working out at Ocean View.

O'Bryan was a great guy. He got us paid... Was the Chairman of the Slush Fund Board. He was the guy who got you a slot at Motion Picture Operators School so you could show movies on cold winter duty nights after three years of freezing your nuts off, standing topside watch on frigid nights. I remember when he said,

"Dex, you idiot sonuvabitch, since you're too dumb, too lazy or too ugly to make a rate, we've gotta figure how to get your butt out of the freezing weather... Three years is enough of that crap."

O'Bryan was the guy who could get the Old Man to do stuff for the animals when he was in a good mood.

"Captain... We've got some year's end money left... Man, those damn foul weather parkas we've got for the lookouts look like hell... They look like stuff you would wear to a gahdam rag pickers ball."

And on the next run, we would have brand new, no salt stains in the armpits parkas... The ones that still smelled like the inside of a naval supply warehouse.

I'm damn proud to say that I rode with Boyce O'Bryan, even if he did tell me and Stuke to... "Shut the f__k up, so a working man can get some damn sleep!" damn near every night. Yeah, I remember O'Bryan... I was his 'organ grinder monkey'.

Ben Bastura, the Keeper of the Flame by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

If you rode submarines, any class, at any point in the history of submarines, you owe a debt of gratitude to a gentleman whose devotion, dedication and hard work has kept much of our heritage from history's overboard trash dump.

When you meet this remarkable gentleman and visit his 'Museum', you'll realize what a difference one man can make when he dedicates his life to a cause so men he never met and ships he never sailed in, will not be lost in the shuffle of the submarine force's ever-changing history and emphasis on each new class of submersible.

Ben Bestura has literally sacrificed his home to house our legacy. I visited this gentleman thanks to John Wynn, one of the shoemaker's elves of Groton Base. I have no idea where Mr. Bastura sleeps... All of the rooms in his house warehouse our history... Yours, mine... Our predecessors... Men who rested oars long before most of us were born. Mr. Bastura has rescued forgotten artifacts, written documentation and painstakingly displayed it for everyone to come and see... Anyone who can find their way to his door.

There is no ticket booth... Nothing will show up in a credit card statement. No tax money to generate public criticism and complaint... Just a box on top of filing cabinets containing a file of everything he has been able to find out about each and every boat that went to sea flying U.S. colors.

He never pointed out the box. "Generous John" Wynn whispered to me that the box was the furnace that powered his effort and to toss some fuel in there. Fueling that Aladdin's cave is an honor... An honor each and every raghat that ever stowed his gear inside a pressure hull owes himself to experience.

Mr. Bastura's home is like King Tut's treasure room... World War II Submarine battle flags... Hundreds and hundreds of ship's plaques... Examples of damn near every ship's patch ever conceived... Hundreds of photos, certificates... Unsolicited testimonials, letters of heartfelt thanks running the complete spectrum of the submarine community... From Admiral to Messcook.

Where could you go and take a loving child to see an actual set of thirteen-button blues worn by a mannequin... Complete with 'cuff' Dolphins, a fully loaded combat patrol pin and a ruptured duck patch? How 'bout a Momsen Lung? How about a collection of models of every class of American submarines beginning with John Holland's boat... Handmade by your host, the owner archivist, curator, resident and tour guide? And the 'all of the above' gentleman tells a wonderful story about how he paid some neighborhood lads to haul a creosote-soaked railroad crosstie to his house from which he hand-carved a detailed replica of a fleet boat. Let that sink in a moment... Close your eyes, mentally picture a person carving out a four or five foot smokeboat. Given a choice of doing that or being handed a bowling ball and an ice pick and asked to carve a likeness of Abe Lincoln, I'd go for Lincoln... Why? Because I have seen the submarine and I know that's impossible. I think those handmade models told me the most about the love this gentleman has for submarines.

Mr. Bastura also runs a private submarine research facility out of what were once his dining room and kitchen. Not an amateurish scrapbook collection... No sir, this gentleman has a series of 'boat files' used by historians, writers and old bluejackets,

and he is recognized as the 'go to man' by naval historians world-wide as a major authority on American submarine history.

Before John Wynn, Gumba and the Groton Subvets got Mr. Bastura a printer / copier, he used to take info from his files, crank up his car, go pay to have copies made, come home and mail the material using envelopes and postage stamps he personally paid for. Mr. Bastura is not a Rockefeller or the operator of a diamond mine in his basement... Just a very generous man who feels compelled to keep blowing on the embers of the dying fire of long ago submarine history.

To go to the place where Mr. Bastura could get copies made, he had to back out into a major traffic artery with his car. You would actually have to see this to visualize how dangerous it was. To come close, mentally picture backing a Mexican donkey cart against the traffic flow on the Indianapolis 500. John and Gumba were deeply concerned about Ben's survival, and once you have seen the act performed, you realize that their fear was totally justified.

There are submarine exhibits housed in grand edifices with graphic displays funded by public funds or corporate largess, but none of them represent both submarines and the bluejackets who rode them like this unbelievably extensive collection in a house in Middletown, Connecticut. If you have the opportunity, visit it... You will not regret the decision.

If you can't and you would like to take away some of the financial burden this gentleman has acquiring things and saving our heritage for future generations, you can mail him a check or better yet... Place an upturned white hat on the table at your next Sub Vets meeting or vote him a donation from your base treasury. Nothing you will ever do will have a greater effect on the preservation of submarine history and will send a clearer message of appreciation to this wonderful gentleman. He asks for nothing... Never has... Never will. That too makes him so remarkable.

Also, most of the donations we make get reduced by the porked-up overhead that every benevolent organization pulls as a silent invisible 'dead horse'.

Ben has no Deputy Director for Public Relations... No annual convention... No advertising expense or travel budget. There is just Ben... His house and his rapidly disappearing living space. As his museum expands, he has either got to figure out how to sleep on the roof or pitch a tent in the yard.

Another thing... Do you have some memorabilia tucked away from your days riding the boats? A patch? Photos? Ship's party program? Submarine publication? Uniform? Insignia? Medals? Memories from the War? Do you want these things to live on and to touch and be touched by future generations of red-blooded American lads who will go to sea in submarines? Well, the best thing you can do is pack them up and ship them to Ben before you end up in the nursing home, playing Scrabble with the bedpan lady and your kids start pitching out your gear.

Ben has made iron-clad legal arrangements for the preservation, perpetual display and archiving of his assembled and recorded collection. And do you know what Ben does? He places a 3x5 typed card by each object that is donated to him, giving full credit and attribution to the donor. Nothing is too small or insignificant for Ben's collection... If it concerns submarines, it concerns Ben Bastura.

When you are sitting at your kitchen table writing out a check for Ben, before you fill in the amount... Close your eyes and think of one man who loves our history so much that he whittled a fleet boat out of a railroad crosstie. Then, think of all the other submarine exhibits and displays... Did you ever shake hands with anyone who made one of every class of boat and hacked one out of a creosote-soaked chink of wood as long as your living room sofa? Now, fill in the amount and smile because you have just done more to honor your service heritage than all the years of bingo playing at the American Legion... You've done a very worthwhile thing.

You want to know what the best part about all this is? If Ben thought for one moment I was doing this, he would pick up something from his collection that was solid brass and heavy as hell and part my hair with it. God love him... We were always represented by the finest and Ben Bastura is certainly that.

If I had lived in the Forward Battery, I would probably know how to properly honor this gentleman on behalf of the entire Submarine Force... Platinum special Dolphins or something. But I was an 'After Battery Rat' and I can think of no finer honor than the mental picture of this fine man going to his mailbox day after day and finding envelopes with old stove-up bluejacket return addresses containing modest checks to fuel his work... Hand salutes are great but they don't 'feed the bulldog'.

Ben Bastura, American patriot... Museum builder, librarian, archivist, submarine memorabilia preservationist, historian, pack rat, and above all, probably the best friend a sub sailor ever had.



John Wynn, Ben Bastura, 'Dex' Armstrong

Mike Hemming, The 'Boy Throttleman'

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Let's get this out of the way at the outset. I am an unapologetic Mike Hemming fan. We were shipmates and remain very good friends and the 'Metric-Built Blonde' and I are crazy about Flo Hemming, the lady who has to put up with the rascal.

For those of you who have never had the honor and pleasure of meeting the crazy sonuvabitch, let me fill you in on Mike Hemming. He was one of those 'engine house' snipes.

Most throttlemen on diesel submarines were old raggedy-ass lifers old enough to be your Dad... Old, unsalvageable, raw vocabulary rapscallions who wrestled those big ol' opposed piston 38-D Fairbanks Morse 1600 horsepower rock crushers.

Mike was so damn young when he became an operating throttleman, he became known as the 'Boy Throttleman'. For those of you with no point of reference of which to make a comparison, think of how often you hear of a Little League pitcher with a 100 mph fastball, an Eagle Scout with a laser eye surgery merit badge or a kindergarten kid winning the U.S. Open.

That's what being a teenage engine room boss compares to. In short, Mike Hemming, the 'Earl of Easton' was that good. You do not want to acknowledge that in his presence because every time someone does that, we have to Crisco the egotistical bastard's ears to get him through doorways... His head can go from normal to Mount Rushmore size in thirty seconds.

But, his mechanical expertise pales in comparison to his virtuosity in penning prose.

I once had the honor of standing on a grassy hillside in Arlington Cemetery on a bright Spring day, listening to the beauty of Mike's words float above the final resting place of row on row of fallen heroes.

As those words were read, they triggered the incendiary reaction found in the hearts of true patriots... And were powerful enough to have an old case-hardened World War II submarine skipper withdraw his pocket handkerchief to wipe the moisture from his weather-beaten face.

Mike is a very versatile fellow. At the first Requin reunion I asked,

“Hey Mike, what are you doin' for 'feed yourself' bucks these days?”

Mike said,

“Operating a nursery.”

It was hard to visualize a bearded, barnacle-encrusted Mike riding herd on little crumb crushers in three-cornered pants... Little thumb-sucking pamper soakers. I never thought about the kind of nursery where folks raise plants.

Mike 'Boy Throttleman' Hemming is also a master of the telling of sea stories. I once sat on a USS Carp veteran's backyard patio and damn near laughed myself sick listening to Hemming relate an account of visiting an Italian cathouse... It was like watching Michelangelo paint or Beethoven monkey around, slapping together little musical ditties.

I just knew that a lot of you hadn't had an opportunity to meet Mike and get to know him... Just wanted you to know that he was worth buying a beer for.

If you want to meet a Squadron Six legend, he's it.

Commendation by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

[Note from the Goat: The following is an endorsement that Dex sent to Glenn Harold, the new USSVI Perch Base Commander, upon hearing about Adrian Stuke's elevation to Vice Commander. Too good not to post...]

Glenn,

Adrian Stuke is a power-mad, ambitious, hierarchy climber. A despotic ruler, who crushes the peasant class he rules over. I speak as a former serf in the kingdom over which he ruled.

As a Leading Seaman, he was a fine decent human being... A lighthearted friend of the working man. However, with his elevation to QM3, power instantly corrupted him. He became power-drunk, breathing the elevated air of his lofty position. He beat me like a rented mule.

He repeatedly explained to me that Arliegh Burke personally appointed him to be a 'Petty Officer of the Line' and had grabbed him by the heels and dunked him into the gunk tank of maturity and sophisticated judgement. He repented his sins - which took him damn near two weeks - and ascended to the 'Golden Throne of Naval Leadership'.

From this elevated height, he looked down into the cess pit of the After Battery and instantly recognized the worthlessness of his former friends and low-end professional associates. He explained to those of us still snorkeling in the slime, how difficult it was to walk upright with the additional weight on his left arm represented by that fresh crow. He said that he planned to compensate for his pronounced port list by winning an aircraft carrier anchor pool and buying a ten-pound Rolex watch... And a Dolphin ring with a 25 Carat diamond as a center setting.

The magic wand that pronounced him to be a 'Petty Officer of the Line' did absolutely nothing to secure his bullshit valve. 'Vice Commander' appears most appropriate, since nobody on the face of the earth knows more about the subject of vice. As a matter of fact, he once authored a book entitled *Vice and Prostitution for Fun and Profit within Five Blocks of DesSub Piers*. Yes, if you were looking for an expert on vice, you got one of the best.

Also, when you selected this 'Paragon of Proper Behavior', you were probably unaware that he has been inducted in the *Naval Paint Thieves Hall of Fame* and holds a number of records in various categories of 'Willful Destruction of Naval Property', having covered a major portion of the Atlantic Ocean floor with chipping hammers, paint scrapers, pyrex coffee cups, one pneumatic three-prong knuckle-buster signed for by a lousy COB, Ensign Williams' framed photo of his mother, the COB's referees whistle, and numerous (to remain nameless) empty cans in weighted GDU bags, shortly after the completion of a first night in battery charge.

Far be it from me to be a tattle-tale, but your new Vice Commander never fessed up as to how a set of woman's step-ins got neatly tucked in behind the bolted flange of the 0-2 level chart table. As the Captains phone talker, a position carried on Requin's *Watch, Quarter and Station Bill* as the 'Old Man's Cigar Store Indian', I was present when the skipper found these 'gear-adrift' panties that my friend standing in the starboard lookout shears at the time, had removed from a certain barmaid the night before, while doing homework for his correspondence course in door-to-door gynecology.

He made me an accessory after the fact in many of his questionable activities and taught me that submarine tenders and sheep were intended by the Almighty to be regularly fleeced... And nobody, I mean NOBODY, sheared the sonuvabitches like the 'Great Mustaffah'.

Adrian was so good, he could charm that woman up at the Motion Picture Exchange (The one who looked like Mr. Ed the Talking Horse's mother), into a couple of those good sea prints she had stashed behind the counter.

Adrian was every Tender MAA's dream package... He worked them like they were handpuppets. If Rickover had ever turned water into wine, Stuke would've had two jugs of it before the nukes knew it was missing. When the space shuttle came apart, Adrian was devastated... He told me he had already sold twelve seats on the next one to some Aviation Machinist Mate in San Diego.

I love the guy. The perverted kind of love, born of riding like hell with the posse hot on our heels. A love shared by two guys at the absolute bottom rung of the ladder, who pooled their resources to navigate the tricky world of the 'Non-Rated Bottom Feeder'... The love of a guy that will use any excuse to oogle Janie... Please congratulate him and tell the devious bastard to save me a place, something like 'High Exalted Senior Assistant to His Highness The PERCH BASE Vice Commander and Official One and Two-Way Trashdumper'.

Glenn, have something with advanced gum disease give him a kiss from me.

The Adrian Stuke Deck Force Philharmonic Orchestra by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I played chipping hammer... Fritz played paint scraper... Jack played bass chipping hammer and Adrian played locker lid wrench.

"What in the hell are you talking about, Dex?"

Well let me begin at the beginning.

I doubt that submarines have active deck forces today. Hell, they build the damn things out of color-impregnated kryptonite alloys that don't rust, don't oxidize and can withstand sea pressure twenty-two miles deep.

Smokeboats had pressure hulls made in World War II, out of stuff collected in scrap metal drives. At 412 feet, we all knew that the only thing between us and the entire Atlantic Ocean was a couple of inches of melted beer cans, horseshoes, model 'T' jack handles, baby buggies, whorehouse plumbing, and the diaper pins of future nuke officers. And on a dark night on topside watch, you could actually hear the rust eating the superstructure.

To fight rust and haul stuff heavier than a bank vault door, God created the 'Deck Force'. The only difference between deck apes and organ grinder's monkeys was that the Navy didn't buy us little red suits and little tin cups.

We were the lowest peasants in the submersible kingdom.

On the USS Requin (SS-481), the leading seaman and shop steward of *'The National Brotherhood of Hull Pounders'* was QMSN(SS) Adrian Stuke... Known simply as 'The Legend'. He was also the owner of the largest collection of erotic literature in the squadron... Books of absolutely no literary value whatsoever.

One of the greatest fringe benefits to being a deck ape on Requin was access to Adrian's 'Aladdin's Cave of Paperback Trash'... Books from the 'Fabian' and 'Nightstand' publishing companies. Books about female heroines who used ratguards for ankle bracelets.

Submarine Chief Petty Officers can't stand the sight of an E-3 not engaged in what is known in official Chief talk as 'productive work'. The term 'productive' was improper... The U.S. Navy produces nothing beyond crazy Chiefs and lunatic JGs.

So at nineteen, you had to 'work the system' to survive. Working the system was a survival technique based on creating illusion... An illusion built around the appearance of furious engagement in hard work when in actuality you were heavily engaged in goofing off. Adrian Stuke could have made an obscene fortune teaching 'hard work goofing off' at the Harvard Business School level.

The Deck Force Philharmonic might well be his finest creation.

You can always find rust below the walking deck of a diesel-powered submarine... Smokeboat superstructures are to rust flakes what Iowa is to corn flakes. When the external topside surfaces started looking like the boat had just cleared the drydock after a full overhaul and there was no 2½ ton object that need to be jackassed to the pier, we got sent to 'get a handle on superstructure work'.

We grabbed some gear... Wire brushes, paint scrapers, chipping hammers, and two cans of zinc chromate. All this must be accomplished to loud complaining. Complaints must include derogatory comments about high ranking naval personnel located at least one hundred miles from your mooring lines... References can be made to the illegitimate links in the ancestral heritage of the Chief of the Boat... All the way back to Popeye, the Hun and the cook on Noah's Ark.

You must cuss loudly... Cussing loudly is a professional occupational requirement for deck apes.

You must pack your foulweather jackets with choice literature from the 'Adrian Stuke Forces Afloat Sexually Explicit Library'... Titles like *Biker Babe*, *Teenage Sex Kitten*, *Insatiable Amazon Women*, *Lust in the Dust*, *Swamp Girl*, *The Last Virgin in Texas*, just to mention a few deck force classics.

Stuke only dealt in classics... Lesser literary works got pawned off in wardroom trades with everyone but LT Noel. K. Schilling, who could detect bogus wantonness two miles from the brow.

There are people that you instinctively know not to hand fabricated hokum to. LT Schilling was such an individual. He could unravel enlisted horse manure like Navajo's read sign. Bullshitting Noel K. was a lot like playing Russian roulette with a revolver with the rotating cylinder fully loaded and winning the coin toss for the first trigger pull. We were stupid... But not that stupid.

Once we had had gathered our literature and working man's theatrical props, we would haul topside cursing the entire naval hierarchy from the Chief of Naval Operations to John Paul Jones sainted mother.

We would enter the superstructure from the forward escape trunk beartrap and work our way past the bow planes bull gear to a pleasant place located between the torpedo impulse flasks and the after bulkhead of the bow buoyancy tank and flanked by a

double row of limber holes. The two-tiered rows of free flooding entry points allowed the gentle breezes wafting in from the Elisabeth River to make this location quite pleasant.

It was affectionately known as the 'Siesta Nest'... The nest part stemming from the fact that we padded the pressure hull with layers of loose corrugated cardboard and foul weather jackets.

We would get comfortably situated and take out our carefully selected reading material...

"Anyone wanna read *Cheerleader Nympho*?"

"Naw, read it in Halifax last year on duty night."

"Hey Stuke, is *Peaches the Panty Princess* any good?"

"Depends ... If you're into gang seduction by visiting football teams... County fair winners and most of the guys attending a regional Shriners' convention."

At some point the orchestra conductor would assign the instruments comprising his orchestra.

"Dex, here's a chipping hammer... You play alternating pressure hull and impulse air flask."

"Fritz... You play pressure hull and bow buoyancy with a wire brush handle."

"Jack... Whack the superstructure and bull gears with that paint scraper and I'll bang away on the hull with this line locker 'T' wrench."

This is how a goof-off concert worked. Everytime you turned a page in whatever you were reading, you would take five or six whacks, bangs or thumps on some close by metal surface.

Adrian properly concluded that with the variety of instruments combined with a wide range of reading speeds, the noise created would give anyone in the forward torpedo room and the forward battery wardroom, the impression that heavy hull preparation was taking place.

We, for obvious reasons did not advertise the true nature of what went on in that small kingdom behind bow buoyancy tank. Belonging to Adrian Stuke's topside gang was a lot like working for the Wizard of Oz or Jesse James.

Once you got used to the noise, the Siesta Nest wasn't that bad... The Elisabeth River stunk like the armpit of a week old dead gorilla, you could get a weird limber hole

sunburn if you used them for available reading light and peeing out the limber holes on the tanktops didn't add anything to the home of the orchestra, but it sure as hell beat working. Down below, the exec would turn to the skipper...

"Ed, you have to hand it to those lads, they've been bustin' their butts up there all day. How 'bout knocking them off early and giving them a head start on the Squadron..."

"Sound like a good idea."

There's a bond that forms between co-conspirators who are forced by lack of respected status, to operate at toilet tank level in submarine society. It lasts for years... One of my proudest achievements in life was playing chipping hammer in the Adrian Stuke Deck Force Philharmonic Orchestra.

And one night, with me and Stuke on the planes, A.L. Conaty yelled down from the helm...

"Jeezus Kriste... I left *The Lust Maidens from Island X*, up in the Nest."

No one on the air, trim and hydraulic manifolds had any idea what A.L. was talking about... Just idiot E-3 talk.

But Stuke and I knew that at this very moment an enlisted literary masterpiece was probably gently floating around in the forward superstructure seeking egress through a limber hole where it could drift slowly to the floor of the Atlantic.

Many years later after the whiz kids of naval research had cracked whatever code it took to converse with porpoise so they could be used in military intelligence collection and mine location, the conversation went like this...

"Mister Dolphin, is there anything significant that you would like us to know about you?"

"Yeah... I read *The Lust Maidens from Planet X* thirty two times."

It was all long ago... When submarines had superstructures to dope off in and deck force idiots...

And of course, Adrian Stuke, with his amazing orchestral renditions.

The Pier Dumpsters by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The area around and adjacent to the dumpsters midway down Pier 22 was the 'Village Green' of Submarine Squadron Six.

There were six 'open top' Dempster Dumpsters, known to the lower elements of the bottom-feeding enlisted community as the 'Dumpsty Derbys', the 'Garbage Boxes' or simply the 'Dumpsters'. As I said, there were six of them with individual stenciling reading, 'EGG SHELLS', 'SCRAP METAL', 'OILY RAGS', 'WOOD', 'PAPER', and 'EDIBLE GARBAGE'.

"Edible garbage?"

"Yeah, I wonder who eats the gahdam stuff."

"Marine Corps... Gotta be the damn Marines. You could shovel up the floor in the monkey cage at the zoo, grind it up and feed it to the jarheads and they wouldn't recognize any difference from what they normally feed the poor bastards."

We later found out that pig farmers bought the stuff to feed their porkers. Pigs won't eat swill with eggshells in it so that's why they had a separate dumpster for eggshells. Isn't it amazing what you learned riding submarines?

In the world of an After Battery Rat, the dumpsters were where we met... Exchanged what served as inter-boat news... Shared off-color jokes and the intelligence exchanged by bottom feeders. We cussed chiefs, junior officers, tender Master-at-Arms, kings, queens, and shoeshine boys. We could get away with it for one simple reason... No one above E-3 ever turned up at the dumpsters to socialize with his fellow submariners.

The pier dumpsters were our sanctuary. After evening chow, the mess cooks collected and washed the cups, dishes and eating utensils, scoured the pots and pans and wiped down the tables. If the cook needed peeled spuds, you could usually get some of the qualified guys to peel 'em during the movie, in exchange for an early movie start. Since most mess cooks were unqualified, they were not allowed to watch nightly movies for the same reason Uncle Tom and his mates weren't allowed to attend polo matches and foxhunts.

"Scuse me Chief Boss Man, does you wants me to git wrapped around some trim and drain tonight? Thank you Massa... Don't beat me... Please don't beat me."

So we would haul our garbage out to the dumpsters, the E-3 equivalent of Briar Rabbit's briar patch and commiserate with our fellow indentured servants. In short, it was like the nightly gathering of hyenas at the local watering hole.

The pier dumpsters were not a location frequented by officers, chiefs, senior petty officers or any other dog catcher interested in how a non-rated animal was doing in his quals. It was a safe haven for After Battery Rats.

After the boats in both nests had secured from evening chow, the mess cooks would haul the garbage over to the dumpsters. Within a half hour, the duty mess cooks of

every boat in the squadron and any visiting boat or boats, would be assembled for the nightly information swap.

"You'll never guess what happened over on Redfin tonight."

"What happened?"

"Started to watch the movie and found all the reels were mixed up from other movies. Boy, was there some hell raising going on when I left."

"What in the hell happened on Carp around noon?"

"The Skipper got his third full stripe. We tossed him over the side."

"Hey, what in the hell's goin' on in Cuber?"

"Castro's gone communist."

"I thought he was some kinda Robin Hood...What'n the hell did he wanta go communist for?"

"How'n the hell do I know? This may come as a surprise horsefly, but Castro doesn't check in with me on a regular basis."

"Who cares?"

" You ever been to Cuba? The place is a damn dump... A dump with palm trees."

"Got good beer and cigars."

"Got whores haulin' every kind of bug, itch and VD ever invented."

"There's some places that are really nice."

"I musta missed 'em. I just saw all the places that looked like a pig pen."

"Whatcha think about Y.A. Tittle?"

"He should retire... He was a very great quarterback but he's too damn old now."

"He's my damn hero... Hate to think of him going out like that Bears game."

It was inane conversation but it was the way that those of us who entered SubRon Six at the lowest rung on the hierarchical ladder, solidified our membership credentials. We got to know each other by swapping stories, cigarettes and news... Showing each other snapshots of our girls... Family... Cars we once owned. We traded rather inflated tales

of high school sports prowess... Scholastic achievement and sexual exploits (mostly imaginary).

We became submarine sailors.

"At the dumpsters" you say?

Yes at the dumpsters. Why? Because we became a team. We never knew it was happening but we became, and were accepted as, SubRon Six men.

At the dumpsters we formed the friendships that tied our boats together.

All a chief had to do to locate something, would be to ask one of the animals aft, because we knew guys on all the other boats. We swapped stuff like Bedouins and in doing so, kept our antiquated boats operational. If the modern submersible Navy doesn't reinstitute some institutional water holes for the low end lads... Things like communal refuse dumping... Loading stores in the rain... All hands gear jackassing, things like that, they will lose their small unit cohesion and the strong sense of belonging that smokeboat sailors had. The introduction of the duel crew system on nuke boats solved a command problem but it was a solution arrived at by heavyweight officers. To an old smokeboat sailor, sharing your boat with another crew is a lot like sharing your wife with the New York Yankees.

A ship belongs to her crew. It has been that way since Noah. A ship with multiple crews would seem to me to be like a floating motel. I would not feel like she was 'ours' like I did about my boat. Sailors need to have an exclusive relationship with the boat they ride. I wonder if the clown who came up with the 'Blue' and 'Gold' crew concept was into wife swapping? Requin was mine. Sure, there had been crews before mine and there were crews long after I tossed my gear on the pier. But for the time I rode her, I was personally accountable for my assigned gear... Nobody else monkeyed around with it or maintained it... That gear belonged to Dex and if I had neglected my preventive maintenance responsibilities, there would have been no 'He said', 'She said' cross finger pointing. Dutch Vanderheiden, the Chief of the Boat, would have known beyond a shadow of a doubt exactly what set of hippockets to plant his size fourteen brogan between. In the smokeboat world, boat loyalty was tied directly to the exclusivity of the love between boat and bluejacket.

Also, if I had not interacted with the other lads in my squadron, then my squadron would have meant about as much to me as my present zip code. We became... And have always been... Family.

The problem as I see it with ship loyalty and squadron esprit, is multi-fold. Officers in high-altitude leadership positions have been matured in a system that had no concept of the smokeboat sailor's love of his boat and his squadron. These heavy metal gentlemen would scratch their heads in wonder at the idea that lads once had loyalty to a pier, because they identified with that pier. It was for many of us who actually lived

aboard the boat, home... The pier was the only address we had... It was Smokeboat Main Street. If they had any idea how much that pier meant to us, how much it was a part of us, they would have found some way to have retained the '22' designation. They have diminished the history of the force by their indifference to our history. These Techno-Moonbeam Boat Jockeys have systematically destroyed all the things that could have been the links by which we could have been joined... The sinews that should have tied us together.

History is continuity, the continuous chain of events and honored traditions of a force. Failure to honor the traditions of those who have gone before in effect, destroys the links to that history.

Why did they have to change the SubRon Six insignia? We had to recreate our squadron insignia for our SubVets vests. Why? Why did the nukes feel compelled to shitcan the insignia we wore and served? Hey, the new one is a sterile logo and means nothing to the lads who remember what the old one meant when you were visiting other squadrons. That brightly colored rascal was recognized by anything wearing bow and stern planes in the North Atlantic. It said, 'SubRon Six has arrived... Run out your good lookin' gals and ice down the beer.'

The same men who scrapped the old '*VOLENS ET POTENS*' insignia would go crazy if someone even remotely mentioned changing the insignia of the United States Naval Academy.

Why? I'll tell you why... They never shared the good times we did out there on Pier 22 down by the dumpsters, sitting just forward of the bow of the Kittiwake... Swapping lies, bumming smokes and becoming submarine sailors.

If you were standing topside watch on a boat in the after nest, you could always tell when it had been a good night out by the dumpsters by the number of cigarette butts bobbing in the water below your screwguards.

And you were damn proud to have been a part of it all... And the Squadron put down oak tree size roots in young hearts, from acorns picked up out at the dumpsters.

Bunk Bags by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

If you never rode the boats, this is going to sound silly and make absolutely no damn sense to you. If you did, you will remember the damn things and probably smile.

The contraptions were simply called bunk bags. Not 'U.S. Navy Bags, Bunk, Type II Mod 6, Unit of Issue, One Each'. Not 'Shipboard Personal Gear Storage Pouch (Submarine) with Zipper'... Just gahdam 'bunk bags'.

They were elongated bags, designed specifically for horizontal passageway storage, hung from the tubular bunk frames on diesel boats. They were ugly, a sickening shade of lime-green (which incedently, closely resembled the color of barf after a three-day drunk) and had four snap straps that connected them to the bunk rail.

It is my understanding that they were intended to eliminate the noise level created by Gillette safety razors, Zippo lighters, busted Timex watches, dice, flashlights, coins, and shrunk heads, purchased as gifts for wives, from rattling around in an aluminum sidelocker and giving away your position.

They were either that lime-green or some kind of gray tweed and they were uglier than a blindman's bride.

But they had many desirable qualities if you were a nomadic resident of a submersible septic tank. First, they increased the allowable storage space and damn near doubled it. In layman's terms, an E-3 could accumulate worldly goods amounting to those on par with migrating Mongolians and folks doing life on Devil's Island.

Next, and this can only be appreciated by an idiot bastard who ever had the wonderful experience of a surface battery charge in a state five sea, the damn things hanging down on the passageway side of a berthing compartment, kept you from being beat to death, bouncing off inanimate objects bolted to the pressure hull. They serve to pad the piping surrounding the bunks known as bunk rails. Your ribs were very grateful.

But the best thing about bunk bags was their ability to be converted into instant short-range luggage... Sort of a 'submariners Samsonite overnight' bag. By snapping the two center straps together, you could create what passed for a luggage handle... A poor excuse for a carrying device, but usable. A bunk bag full of the supplies needed for a 72-hour excursion into the heartland of the civilian population, was the worst of all possible choices.

Mentally picture the left leg of a fat woman's panty hose filled with Jello and stitched up at the open end and at midway from thigh to toe, attach a sea bag handle and you have the most unwieldy AWOL bag ever created and the ugliest gahdam contraption ever invented by man... A floppy sausage full of the meager possessions of a long-range boat bum.

The damn things had one distinct advantage that no other personal gear conveyance had. If you saw some fleet untouchable standing beside the highway with one of the fool things at his feet, you knew immediately that the hitchhiking sonuvabitch was a boatsailor. A fellow submarine sailor would burn flat spots in a new set of tires, stopping to pick you up.

To every old white-haired smokeboat vet, the words 'bunk bag' bring a smile to his weather-beaten face. You would find it damn hard to come across an old petroleum-

powered submersible resident who didn't have fond memories of the worthless sonuvabitches.

Sixty-Five Cent Orion Haircuts by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In the 1950's, if you had long hair you had to be a first chair violinist with some major philharmonic orchestra, some guy playing Daniel Boone on T.V., a physics professor, a worthless bum, a light-in-his-loafers hair dresser or some guy who just reached civilization after a jungle plane crash.

Back in those days if you reached a point where six hairs on your head got over a half-inch long, your old man would threaten to buy you a pocket book, rhinestone earrings and a gahdam pair of patent leather pumps. It was an era where being caught wearing an earring left your only acceptable excuse being that you were a card-carrying pirate.

We had a Chief of the Boat who was convinced that an E-3's I.Q. could be elevated by 'in port' haircuts. He claimed that he had conducted scientific research on the subject and had reached the conclusion that enlisted intelligence was directly related to hair follicle length. I think he came to this amazing conclusion when he met with his fellow 'scientists' up at the Chiefs' Club and joined in alcohol-induced joint research. The major bi-product of this joint research was enriched bullshit.

But because of an unfair system of naval power distribution created by none other than 'I've just begun to fight' Jones, E-3s must do the bidding of an E-7. It appears that in his haste to improve the N.B.A., Lincoln absent-mindedly forgot to free the non-rated animals in the After Battery.

"Gahdamit Armstrong, go up and get a frigging haircut! Either that, or go buy a gahdam coonskin hat and a fucking muzzle loader."

"Damn Chief, we're going out Monday. You see the OP orders? We going out for some kind of underway fashion show?"

"You don't get a haircut and you'll find yourself wearing a red hair bow during the entire run."

"You've gotta be kidding?"

"Not on your ass, horsefly."

"Get one of those Mother Onion scalp jobs? Be a shipmate Chief... Don't make me go up there to those 'Lighthouse for the Blind' barbers with training wheels... C'mon Chief... Don't you know what a sixty-five cent Orion haircut can do to a bluejackets love life?"

"Dex, I've seen some of your love life... Trust me son, they won't care."

"Have a heart Chief... Don't force me to call the Arleigh Burke Center for Abused Naval Personnel and turn you in for being a gahdam insensitive power-mad sonuvabitch."

"Don't force me to plant this size 14 brogan square in your ass. Now haul your non-rated smart mouth idiot ass up on Orion and get your shaggy locks trimmed up."

"Thank you,... Aye, aye... I'ze gwine'a be goin' massa Boss Man... Gwine'a be go on up dere to da big house and gits masseff acceptable in yo sight... Gonna gits maseff sheared simply to retain yo love."

"You don't start moving horsefly, and there's going to be a whole lot of slow walkin' and sad singin."

"They treat qualified officers like this?"

"How'n the hell would I know, I've never been one."

The Orion... USS Orion (AS-18) was affectionately known to the animals living in the iron contraptions nesting on the other side of Pier 22 as 'Mother Onion'. It was like a floating community, crossed with a seagoing repair facility. I say 'seagoing' because every leap year or Chinese year of the Blind Horny Toad, Mother Onion went to sea. Since the interval between Orion's saltwater round trips, exceeded the length of time that officers remain qualified to con a ship underway, the Orion had to dragoon some poor smokeboat sonuvabitches to take the overgrown steel bastard out and back.

Orion had a ships service (miniature Seven-Eleven-like gadget stand), a small stores (official issue outlet), a snack bar, laundry and dry cleaner that actually ate clothing or stole stuff from seagoing sailors to redistribute to the ambulatory brain dead zombies who lived on Mother Onion. So all the smokeboat residents did business with the Chinese bandits who worked out of a beat-up truck at the pierhead.

And, it had a two-chair barbershop where grown men turned up, who had absolutely no self-respect and paid sixty-five cents to be turned into objects of amusement for their shipmates. One of the reasons the armed forces issues hats and requires that they be worn, is that they don't want the public to know what haircuts given by blind men, look like.

Orion's barbershop was a little larger than the trunk of a '49 Buick. Every time I went there, the two pretend barbers were standing damn near knee deep in unfortunate sailors lost hair.

"Hey sailor, don't leave... Sit down... Take a load off your feet, there's only four guys in front of you... It'll take about ten minutes."

"Ten minutes! Holy Christ... Whadaya use, a gahdam wolverine taped to a stick? Are you serious? Ten minutes?"

"Knock it off... For sixty- five cents a head, I don't include listening to a boatload of unnecessary submariner bullshit."

"Sorry sweetpea, didn't know that you gahdam cranium-butchers were so sensitive. A man who calls himself a barber and turns out work like you do, should be ashamed of himself."

"Would it be possible for you to pipe down... Take a seat and wait your turn?"

"You a Second Class? Second Class what? Second Class Barber, I'll bet THAT'S no lie."

"Is being a smartass a requirement for riding those stinking submarines?"

"Not necessarily, but being able to tie your shoes and eat with a fork is, which eliminates damn near every barbers mate."

"Next..."

"Hey Skitch... Did you actually want the tennis ball look?"

"What the hell, Dex we're going to spend three weeks of ping time, then put into 'Rosey Roads'... Who cares?"

"Hey barber person, how long does it take one of these half-assed sheep shearing jobs to heal?"

"Look... All this would be easier on all of us, if you could just shut the fuck up and wait your turn."

"The haircut is just worth a dime... I'm just getting my other 55 cents worth in pinning the tail on your donkey."

"Next..."

If you didn't get your haircuts on Orion, You could always get one from Quesada, one of the officers stewards.

'Que' (pronounced 'cue') was a damn good barber. I don't think I ever told him that. Abusing poor Que was a form of forward room entertainment. We treated the poor devil as if he was always spying for the wardroom. Que was a good-natured little guy, and always went along with the gag. He was quite likable and had all the qualities found in truly good shipmates. We were all proud to be his shipmate.

"Que, you little spying weasel, what kind of stuff do you tell the Old Man and the forty thieves?" (The forty thieves was raghat code for the wardroom.)

" I tell them all Torpedomans are good for nuthing sumunabitches."

"And what does the Old Man say?"

"He agree... He say Que, you don't hang around doze no gudt for nothing sumunabitches... Dey ruin you all time."

"Que, whatz the chance of getting a haircut?"

"Chance berry gudt after I clean up wardroom mess and start officer movie. You know me charge two dollah an no take no damn package of cigarettes... Want money. Captain say, Que, any no gudt basturd cheat you, you tell me anna I pin hell on dee inconsiderate monkey."

"Is that exactly what the old man said?"

"Not zackly but dat what skipper mean to say."

"What's the going 'By the ton bullshit rate' in the Philipines, Que?"

"You get pretty beeg pile of water buffalo shit for two torpedomans and a Marine who guard gate."

"How'bout that haircut?"

"You hand over da two bucks, I give you haircut dat make all womenz theenk you Cary Grant."

"How 'bout, John Wayne."

"John Wayne for manz...Cary Grant for womenz... You queer bluejacket? You play drop soap? I tell old man."

Que held his own... But more than that, he was a very generous and considerate shipmate. And he exemplified all the traits that you find in the best submariners. There is no man alive today who served with Quesada who doesn't break into a smile at the mention of his name. We loved the little guy.

One night we got word a lad's mother had passed away and he was back in the alley rooting through the gear in his locker and tossing stuff in an AWOL bag to head home for her funeral.

"Danny, slow down. Mr. Schilling no take you to airport for until haff hour. I give you haircut so you not look like gahdam submarine bum when you go say goodbye to mother."

And when he said, "I give you haircut" he meant I *give* you. Que's contribution to the funeral ~ 'Haircut in lieu of flowers.'

If you end up in Hell, you won't have any difficulty locating barbers off Orion... All the bastards are down there somewhere.

But if you've lived the kind of life that draws you a Heavenly duty assignment... Look around for Que's Barbershop... It'll be in the part of Heaven where they billet the really good guys.

Just don't tell him a forward room torpedoman sent you.

There Was A Time When There Were Two Submarine Forces by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I came out of Great Lakes a freshly minted bluejacket, everything I owned in a big canvas bag, and ready to take my bite out of the center of the pie. I was heading for New London to become a member of the elite Submarine Force.

When I arrived, I was greeted with a welcome that made it gahdam clear there was not one big happy family Submarine Force, there were two... The modern pampered and catered to, whiz bang sub force and one where lads with second class Dolphins rode extinct equipment and were arrogant enough to refuse to lay down, rollover and die... The serfs who rode antiquated hulls and got the castoff handouts of the uptown boys. The sad and sickening part of it all was it was a cold, calculated intentional policy of exclusion.

When I stepped down from the bus that hauled me from the train station in downtown New London to a parking lot next to Dealey Center, it began.

"Okay, line up, drop your gear... You ain't in the gahdam radioactive Navy and I ain't your sugar tit wet nurse."

The Chief's tirade went on for the better part of a half hour. I remember parts of that wonderful oration... Things like,

"You worthless, good fer nuthin' sonuvabitches will be standing fire watches and falling out for any other shit detail we get handed from the First Lieutenant's Division... Read the gahdam Watch, Quarter and Station Bill... You see those old wornout barracks up there on the hill? The ones that look like Salvation Army homes for bums? They are for

you 'soon to be obsolete' idiots. Gentlemen, you are going to school for ten weeks to become fleas on a dying dog."

It was right there that I learned that it was not all one big 'Brothers of the 'Phin' boatservice.

There were the pampered lads who lived on the same hill and ate off porcelain plates with shiny new knives and forks and there were the skid row diesel bums who ate off stamped out stainless steel shingles with utensils that looked like King Kong had scratched his ass with them.

Since I was part of the disenfranchised white trash side of the United States Submarine Service... Being groomed to ride the oil-sucking dinosaurs, I was not allowed to visit the (quote) Nuclear Power School or gaze upon the climate-controlled four man cubicles with individual desks and lamps. You know, the really neat stuff you see Rickover showing you in old film footage on the Discovery Channel.

We lived in an open bay barracks. We slept 'head to foot' in steel two-high racks on mattresses that looked like Grapes of Wrath salvage. Our climate control was 'Windows up, windows down'... 'Flies in, flies out'... 'Mosquitoes in, mosquitoes out'.

In lieu of individual desks with lamps, we had a lighted shower and heads with no privacy panels that allowed guys to sit next to each other and study 'trim and drain' drawings until their feet fell asleep and they got a bad case of 'Pinocchio legs'.

This is just a simple statement of historical fact about an era conveniently forgotten in the kissy-hug lovefest, of the modern myth 'all for one and one for all' submarine force... The history old mellowed out smokeboat boys figure they would be roundly condemned for mentioning... But still laugh about among themselves at boat reunions.

I rode with a damn fine bunch of proud submariners. We lived in conditions worse than the penal system imposes on mass murderers awaiting lethal injections, and loved it.

Never saw a nuke boat sailor in Bells... Or any diesel boat dives that were finishing schools for seagoing pool shooting, Slim Jim consuming, underwater smokeboat rodents.

Used to sit on an empty five-gallon MEK can topside in ratty previously issued foulweather gear with sewn up rips and watch the fashion parade of nukes belch forth from visiting nuke boats.

"Hey Stuke... Look at those nylon foulweather jackets the uptown folks are wearing this season."

"Yeah... 'Il bet no boatsailor ever wore one of those sonuvabitches listening to Tokyo Rose on the R.B.O."

I'm proud of my service in smokeboats... I can watch John Wayne in Operation Pacific, Cary Grant in Destination Tokyo, all the Silent Service episodes... World War II submarine programs on the History Channel and fondly remember the sounds, smells and air so gahdam dead, you couldn't light a Lucky Strike.

I remember the honor we felt and the respect we gave our fine officers... And the way we loved the old boats and the hull numbers that were our movable saltwater street addresses.

The father of the nuclear navy it seems, did not want to infect his new professional force with the nonsensical foolishness he felt characterized the happy-go-lucky diesel force... And it appears he was successful.

Many lads who rode the low-numbered oil-eaters visited visiting nuke boats and returned with the glow of little sharecropper's kids who had been visiting the rich man's big house.

"Dex... There's no dirt... They smell like the inside of a new car... Everybody gets their own bunk... And man, their bunks have bunk lights that work, a multi-channel music system that allows you to listen to whatever kind of music you like, through your very own headset... They have privacy curtains so you can read after lights out."

The guy telling me this was a member, like me, of the white trash side of the SubLant house, who, unlike his nuke paygrade counterpart had to hunt an empty rack every night and crawl up on a stinking flash pad, pack his foul weather jacket up under his head and pull a ratty worn-out blanket over himself.

"Dex, they have these nylon one-piece jumpsuits... And they all look alike."

"My gahdam girl wears nylon... Called panties."

At the time, the two of us were wearing paint splattered dungarees, redlead-flecked G.P. boots and whitehats that looked like they'd been used to clean a Mexican Texaco men's room.

"Screw'em... The damn things sound like negatively buoyant sorority houses."

At times, ragging nukes was the only entertainment we had sitting topside on a balmy summer evening, catching a smoke and watching the pier strollers. Especially on nights when the movie being shown in the Crews Mess starred bastards who died ten years before you were born... You know, guys like Sidney Greenstreet... And on nights the evening meal tasted like B.F. Goodrich retreads. You'd just pull up an empty zinc chromate can... Bum a Pall Mall and a light... Join your brother bums and start the conversation with,

"Screw the nuke navy and the horse it rode in on."

That was usually good for a half hour of creative complaining and laughs. But, deep down inside we all knew that the old iron monsters we called home, were terminal. The old gals were simply scrapyard cheaters waiting in line for a date to be turned into razor blades and bra hooks. Those big ugly boats with the pixie dust boilers were the future and intuition told you that after you tossed your seabag over the brow, they were going to be selling a helluva lot more shoe polish to guys wearing silver twin-fish and nobody would be soaking themselves with Aqua Velva to survive water restriction.

Wouldn't have had it any other way... It was the life I came to know and love. I served in the 'other' Submarine Force... The one that has no recorded history after they launched the 571.

The Thinning Ranks of Lockwood's Iron Men

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Do you remember them? The old rascals with the red hash marks and rate chevrons? Five or six rows of damn meaningful ribbons... Dolphins and a Combat Patrol pin?

Back in the days when those forged in combat, case-hardened bastards roamed the piers of submarine bases and butt-buffed barstools in establishments throughout the world no self-respecting devil would be caught dead in... We called them simply... the World War II guys.

They had not only 'seen the elephant', they saddle broke him and rode him all the way to Tokyo.

If you melted down all the gold hash marks and rates in their submarine service, you wouldn't have had enough material to have hammered out a Birmingham bus token.

Gold geedunk and good conduct medals were not a big defining area of consideration in the world of these red blooded American giants... Men, who had gone to sea in iron sharks and chewed the heart out of the Japanese naval war machine, didn't require any additional credentials to reinforce their personal reputations.

The rollicking bastards had written their saga in a trail of rusting hulks and busted bar furniture from Hell to Hokaido... And had sent an endless stream of oriental miscreants off to Buddha amid fire and the smell of burning Torpex. In 1945, they were the unquestioned hairy- chested jungle kings of the Pacific... 'Uncle Charlie's, get the hell out of my way' card-carrying rascals... Admiral Charles Lockwood's iron men.

In my day, they were the men who held the senior leadership positions... The proven and seasoned leadership of the submarine service. They were the 'old men of the sea' to us. And all we wanted... All we aspired to be, was to be like them and worthy of their acceptance.

As we grew old... They grew even older. I am not sure they mellowed, just grew long in the tooth and spent more and more time burying each other and cussing hearing loss and the pros and cons of Polygrip, Viagra and Metamucil.

Every year, some idiot jaybird would show up on their TV tube and tell about this wonderful World War II Memorial, that was to be built in their nations capital. Then, mister TV man would disappear until next Groundhog Day.

There was the Tooth Fairy, the Easter Bunny, Santa Claus, and the World War II Memorial. The 'eternal patrol' sailing list grew longer and longer and no national recognition for the greatest generation. We built monuments to honor the participants of lesser 'wars', conflicts... Conflicts that never really ended... Ones we lost... But we just never got around to honoring the quiet generation that fought and won a world-wide hellraiser and handed this nation its last two fully Unconditional Surrenders against two of the most insidious regimes Satan ever gave birth to.

Old Gringo, Capt. Ned Beach, Capt. George Street are numbered among those who got their final orders and couldn't wait. They are numbered among those who will never see the Memorial built to honor them... Every day the list of eligible and deserving wearers of the combat pin, shrinks.

Of the sins of man, indifference and ingratitude are the most difficult to survive. Bureaucratic indifference compounds the shameful nature of our national failure to extend to these very non-demanding warrior giants a long overdue national handshake. Shame on us... Shame on us all.

What we do or not do, will not change the record they wrote in valorous deeds and sublime self-sacrifice so many years ago. They will always be the men who went to sea and struck their blows for freedom, liberty and our American way of life from beneath the sea. Men who shared bad air, depleted rations, and the deafening sounds of enemy depth charges, together. Men who wore sweat-soaked dungaree shirts and repeatedly pinned the tail on Hirohito's donkey.

No, they created their own memorial... The one signed by the little grinning buck-toothed monkeys on the deck of the USS Missouri in Tokyo Harbor... A harbor totally absent of Nip war vessels that missed the terminal festivities because of U.S. submarine prearranged dates with Pacific Ocean floor oxidation.

Many of the still remaining World War II boat sailors will miss the ceremonies and hoopla attending what effete artists and fawning politicians have created as a national thank you. Again... Shame on us.

Your true 'thank you' will rest with history's accounting of what you did, why you did it and the magnificent legacy you passed to the downline members of the United States Submarine Service, and the appreciation of the yet unborn, who will mature in free air without the weight of the despot's heel on their necks.

You were iron men who took iron ships to sea and left an unparalleled record of courage and duty, faithfully performed. A record that should serve to inspire every lad who enters his country's Navy in search of adventure in a service with an extremely proud heritage.

What you did makes what came before and since pale to bullshit by comparison. Somebody needed to say that... Somebody who wore Dolphins and simply wanted to drink beer in your company, listen to your history, ride your boats and feel your handshake of acceptance... You were, are and ever will be, heroes in every sense of the term, to that lad. Your self-sacrifice was unparalleled in the annals of naval history.

So thanks from an old gray haired sonuvabitch who danced with the Goddess of The Main Induction, long after you left her to us. She had holes in her stockings, strands of white hair and sagging tits, but she could still do that North Atlantic saltwater fandango and bounce around like a twenty-year-old fan dancer.

God bless anyone who slammed hatches on the iron monsters that went to periscope depth and sent the saltwater valentines that kept me from ending up eating fish heads and rice, listening to Tokyo Rose bring me the news and saying the pledge of allegiance to that goofy-looking meatball flag.

12 to 4 Topside Watch by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

You have to have been a non-rated raghat to fully understand and appreciate this one.

People who want to feel secure while they are asleep, acquire great big dogs that bark loudly, move at a rate just below the speed of light and are fully capable of chewing off major anatomical appendages.

The Navy takes non-rated idiots, hangs a pistol on them and parks them in a plywood coo-coo clock box by the forward brow. Being a 12 to 4 topside watch was a lot like being a safety patrol on a deadend street.

The only thing moving at that hour of the night was the dumpster jamboree being held by the pier rats... Night rats on Pier 22 were just several ounces short of qualifying for the Kentucky Derby. Then there was the Orion quarterdeck... The night bakers on Orion, Kittiwake, and the boats nesting at 22, cabs delivering drunks or early arriving two-week reservists and shore patrol dropping off shipmates, who (A) didn't know exactly where they were, (B) had been naughty, (C) had been dumb enough to get caught, (D) and could have cared less.

The Exec or the onboard duty officer had to sign some document that the shore patrol presented on a clip board and take custody of our returning hero.

"Excuse me sailor, but could you enlighten me regarding this lads litany of transgressions?"

"Sir, as near as we could tell, the sonuvabitch was carrying a package... Make that 'hauling one hell of a load' and thought giving mambo lessons to five other drunks on the centerline of Taussig Boulevard was 'a good idea'.

Duty Officers always turned to the topside watch and said..."Son, bear a hand and assist this under-the-weather fellow into the boat.

Note: 'Under-the-weather fellow' is wardroom talk for, 'frigging drunk'.

Drunks came in all sizes and conditions. You had 'happy go lucky' drunks. They could be entertaining and provide all the topside watches in the nest a good laugh.

One guy off Cutlass stepped in the middle of the brow between Requin and Redfin, in a driving rain and gave a spirited rendition of *Singing in the Rain* accompanied by a slightly off-centered imitation of Gene Kelly's footwork. His audition came to a screeching halt, when he bounced off Redfin's tank tops. Nobody told him that Cutlass was the outboard boat in the after nest.

The worst kind of drunks were the inebriated citizens who had tossed their cookies all over a peacoat, dress canvas or a set of whites.

Invariably, there was a light breeze and you got the wafting aroma of gastric juice, beer and partially digested Slim-Jims, as the returning warrior started to cross over the inboard boats.

It didn't take you long to recognize that herding a barf-covered bluejacket to either the bear trap or the After Battery hatch was best accomplished by poking the sonuvabitch with a three-foot section of a busted boathook.

Some of the late night returning gladiators bore evidence of hand-to-hand combat. A bloody nose can really screw up a set of Seafarer tailor-made whites.

"Jeezus Jack, you look like tried to stop a railroad locomotive with your nose."

"Naw, had to bounce an Aviation Bosun' mate off a marble bar top. I was tryin' to put my order in for a gahdam burger and fries and this simple bastard kept pushing, poking and shoving me. You know that waitress station down at the end of the bar at the Jolly Roger?"

"Yeah"

"Well I grabbed that idiot jaybird by his neckerchief knot and slammed his kisser down on that marble top bar."

"What the hell happened to you?"

"Well it appears that the worthless sonuvabitch had at least six friends."

Hustling drunks took up only a small fraction of your late night / early morning tour topside.

You listened to Norfolk late night radio. It was mostly slow dance music interspersed with commercials directed at servicemen, cab drivers, all night drug store employees, guys on death row, insomniacs and folks with lousy credit.

"Yes sir, this is Crazy Eddy out on Military Highway. This very day I can put you behind the wheel of a 1938 Hudson with only 450,000 miles on it... Reconditioned engine... White wall recaps and clean ashtrays. Act within the next 24 hours and Crazy Eddy will throw in absolutely free two Gulf station roadmaps of states of your choice and a pine-scented air freshener. Don't worry about your credit rating... If you have an Armed Forces I.D. and an extremely low I.Q., Crazy Eddy can fix you up with nominal transportation."

There are old E-3s from the 1950s who are still mailing monthly checks to crazy Eddy's widow or poking monthly payment in the collection box bolted to Crazy Eddy's headstone.

According to late night Norfolk radio there were folks in the Tidewater area of Virginia who would sell any member of the United States Navy, three quarters of the known world for 'no money down and 37,000 monthly payments with balloon interest payments exceeding the national debt of Venezuela.'

Every guard shack had a phone... An official business phone. Once in a while, the phone was actually used for official business and, when a boat slid alongside from a four or five month Med deployment or extended Northern Run, every phone in the nest did a land sale business in "Honey, I'm back" communication.

Guys would come bounding out of every orifice that the returning steel monster had. All the married guys had a gigantic load of dirty laundry and intentions of getting laid sometime within thirty minutes of linking up with their wife, or the neighbor's cat.

Inside of your average topside watch dog shack you would find more than ample evidence of the hieroglyphics of ancient submariner civilizations. Great meaningful messages like:

'Annie will do you and two of your closest shipmates for fifty bucks U.S... No kissing.'

'For a good time call Ruth, Elmwood 5-9602.'

'Don't do no business at Crumpackers Appliance Mart... The sonofabitchers is thieves.'

'For rides to Philly see Barney Google, Forward Room on Carp.'

Most of the wisdom of Western Civilization was recorded in ballpoint pen on dog shack plywood.

A 12 to 4 tour ended before the Krispie Kreme truck came rumbling down the pier. A good relief would save you and his Below Decks Watch, three apiece. Topside watches looked out for each other, because nobody else did.

There was an invisible union known as the International Brotherhood of Topside Watches, Hull and Superstructure Maintenance Technicians and Refuse Disposal Facilitators. Those of us actively engaged in the above enumerated professional specialties belonged and we didn't know it at the time, but the benefits have lasted a lifetime.

You would be both surprised and amazed at the number of former practitioners of those sophisticated occupational specialties, you meet at your average smokeboat reunion. Guys who can still throw a square knot in a weighted GDU bag tie up and whose nickname was still whittled in a wooden tabletop up in Bells when the wrecking ball ripped the roof off the national treasure.

Somewhere around 0345 your relief appeared with two Pyrex coffee cups filled with steaming, all night, bottom of the pot liquid Laytex panty girdle cement...

"Got a smoke?"

"Yeah, how long you been out of butts?"

"Since two hours ago."

"That's like giving up sex for Lent."

"Not exactly."

"Anything happening?"

"Not really... The rats seem to be having a real party in the edible garbage dumpster tonight and word has it some diver on Kittiwake got engaged to that red-headed barmaid up at the Victory."

"Anything else?"

"Naw... Just all lines secured, moored as before..."

"Oh yes... The two magazines of 45 Ball are in the watches desk forward of the conning tower fairwater... The magazine holder on the pistol belt has a couple of Clark Bars in it... They're yours."

"Thanks, shipmate."

COMSUBLANT could have trained dogs or monkeys to do it... The gahdam Air Force figured that out. But if the Navy had used dogs, you know who would have ended up scooping up the dog crap after morning quarters, when the CPO's went below for their third cup of 'morning coffee'.

The Granby Street Bus by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

You would have to have been a SUBRON SIX non rated bottomfeeder 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 bootcamp 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 Elisabeth 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.

Where In The Hell Did They Go? by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong



It's funny how late in life, you can come across some seemingly insignificant piece of long ago memorabilia that can trigger a virtual avalanche of memories.

My running mate, Adrian 'The Emperor of The Topside Gang' Stuke mailed me an old dog-eared business card. An old worn dirty card that looks like something you would pull out of an eighteenth century cadaver's pocket. It reads: *Known from Ocean to Ocean, LOVEY'S NAVAL GRILL and KRAZY KAT, Where Friends Meet, at the Main Naval Base Gate, 9896 Hampton Boulevard, NORFOLK, VA*

Lovey's Krazy Kat, once an icon of the Atlantic Fleet along with Bells Bar and Naval Tailors, The Big "O", The Victory, Old Bill's, Little Italy, and the Jolly Rodgers... Gone. Victims of the old wrecking ball of progress.

Long ago on the night after payday, Lovey's was a bluejacket's paradise. The strip outside the main gate at Norfolk's Naval Operating Base (NOB) was one-stop shopping for suds, sex and seamstress services.

You could get a snoot full, digital stimulation, a marginally acceptable meal, a game of pool, dance with women playing dental hookey, blow fifteen bucks on a 'out by the railroad tracks' stand-up, listen to shitkickin' standards played on some of the world's most abused jukeboxes and pledge eternal love to creatures that would give your mother a heart attack.

Lovey's Krazy Kat... Known from ocean to ocean. We're not talking small reputation here. We're talking an establishment known throughout the free world. We are referring to a known conduit through which the riff raff of the seven seas passed at one time or another... A location with once-upon-a-time specific longitude and latitude coordinates, where women's breast attributes were discussed in semi-coherent multilingual conversations over glasses of cheap draft beer. A location where friends and shipmates met, according to the card, to crowd the bar... Step all over each others' liberty shined brogans... Throw quarters in a battered juke box... Shoot pool on tables that looked like

a mole convention had been held under the felt... Eat lukewarm pizza with toppings recently removed from snap traps... And fondle women with Roller Derby scars.

Where did they go, the bluejacket bars? The dark, smokey joints with yellowed photographs of ships that got decommissioned and towed up to the scrap yard before anyone in the place was born. The places where big-busted, hard as nails peroxide blondes drew beer in heavy bottomed mugs, blew the excess foam off and yelled,

"Hey Dumbass, that'll be two bits."

And slid it to you down a bar that had fifty coats of spar varnish on it.

What happened to 'crew hangouts' within walking distance of your mooring lines? What happened to the dingy joints, illuminated by neon beer signs that had tin 'BUY BEER NUTS' signs at eye level above the urinals? Where does a tight crew buy a 'reporting aboard' shipmate a round of 'welcome aboard' beers? Where do you take new dads to smoke their cigars and toast the new arrivals?

Where do the Salvation Army 'Basket Hat' gals go to fill their tambourines on payday? Where do you go to find tables with ship's names and hull numbers carved in them and old faded *The NAVY NEEDS YOU* posters in dust covered frames hanging on the wall next to an old 48-star flag? Where are those places? What in the hell happened to them?

Where do you take a wife or a son to show them the traditional hangouts of your old Squadron? Where can you go to see an old Squadron Six pennant or SUBDIV 62 burgee? An old photo of Orion... Kittiwake... The yellowed photos of old SUBRON SIX meateaters? Where do you go on Halloween night to find a bartender wearing a gorilla mask and a chief's hat? Or a barmaid that will come to your table, hike up her skirt and let you pin a newly issued set of Dolphins on her panties and get a kiss? Do those places exist anymore?

What the hell did the United States Navy do to Hampton Boulevard? They keep asking, "What can we do to improve morale?" Stop leveling our gahdam history. Leave us places to go and run our hands across the tangible evidence of our youthful contribution to the defense of our nation... When we plowed the North Atlantic and knew we would live forever. Sure, base Burger Kings and Taco Tilly's drive throughs, Jiffy Lubes, and Wal-Mart size ships service and curbside geedunk distribution venues are nifty.

But where are the old standby joints where young bluejackets go to hoot, holler... Piss against the wind, cuss northern runs... Light up cheap cigars... Make crude comments... Bitch about sea print movies, chow selections, naval leadership, voo-doo meteorology, stinking flash pads, tender MAAs, Trailways bus schedules, lack of paper in the head, the number of flies on the Shell 'No Pest' strip over the cash register... Barmaid perfume... The prime interest rate... The price of snow tires... Superstructure

rust... And the skipper of the Orion finding a previous-owner tampon in a bridge butt kit?

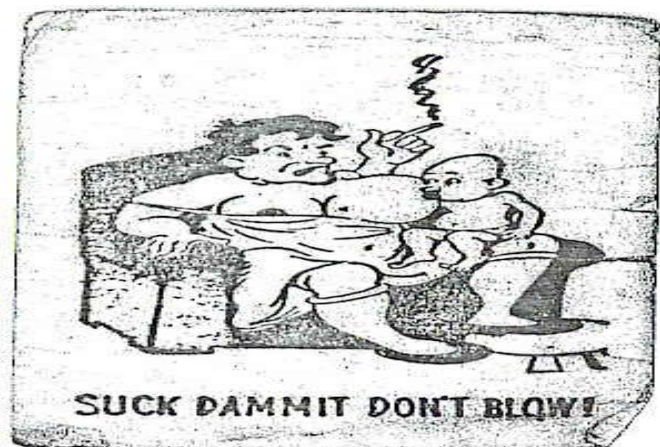
They were more than bars. First and foremost, they were the repositories of small bits and pieces of the history of America's forces afloat. They were the unofficial clubhouses of the lads who went to sea under the flag of the United States. They were places where a downline bluejacket could go and park his butt where his heroes of the past had once parked *their* butts. They were the poor man's Valhalla, where lads who plowed deep salt water, could go and share fellowship and sea stories with fellow practitioners of the nautical arts... A place where well intentioned exaggeration and bullshit-gilded flawed recollection were readily forgiven and accepted.

They were places where lonely strays could find convenient harborage alongside a warm feminine fanny on a cold night... For less than forty bucks.

A curse on the brainless bastards who destroyed them. Removing history and erasing everything but the warm memories in old sailor's hearts and replacing that tradition with grass and sterile asphalt was a stupid idea... A decision probably made by a bunch of supposedly civic-minded mass-manipulated hand puppets who had no idea they had removed our Br'er Rabbit laughing places.

Adrian Stuke, my forever running mate and fellow ark animal returned to me the nickel plated memories of youth... Long ago shore patrol paddy wagon pier deliveries... Standing on sidewalks in penguin polka weather singing Christmas carols with a Salvation Army band, drunker than a hoot owl... Shooting pool for Slim Jims two days before payday... Leaving the lucky silver dollar your uncle Joe gave you, for a barmaid tip because on E-3 pay you had to survive on living moment to moment.

Lovey's Krazy Kat is gone, only to live on for the brief time God has allotted the remaining coots who patronized this historical landmark. The corner opposite the main gate at the Norfolk Naval Base is a bare as a baby's fantail . But somewhere out there, somewhere on this earth, there has to be a plywood head stall door panel with the date I qualified, whittled on it... Right beside, "*For a good time phone Trixie NA 3-2195 Newport News*" written in ballpoint...The only remaining evidence of an old wornout, long ago bluejackets boatservice.



Popeye Meets Technological Marvel by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Before I begin, I would like to preface my remarks by establishing my credentials so you will template my technical observations by using the following standard to gauge the level of my competence and expertise regarding the subject I will discuss. I write in run-on sentences...because I think in run-on sentences. I am 63 years old...safe to say, that won't change...it's the 'Old dog-New tricks' thing, everybody talks about.

I was a submarine qualified E-3 who rode submarines powered by fuel, Mother Nature squeezed out of very dead dinosaurs. I held the following extremely responsible positions in the Atlantic Submarine Force...Messcook...later Senior Messcook and First Loader on the GDU...Garbage Disposal Unit...At sea I was the Sail Door Launcher of One and Two-way trash, and High Altitude Bridge Tosser when the seas were rough and ship's refuse had to be pitched over the side, from the bridge. I was also a Jack-of-all-Trades, Lookout, Helmsman, Interchangeable Bow and Stern Planesman...Topside Watch, Leading Seaman, Linehandler...Master Rated Chipping Hammer, Paint Scraper, Three Prong Knucklebuster, Wire Brush and Paint Pot Operator....aka Zinc Chromate Man. I was also a qualified Motion Picture Projector Operator, Guard Mail Hauler, In port Below Decks Watch Stander...Slush Fund Board Member, Wardroom Coffee Hauling Flunky...Tender Thief...and Mayor of Hogan's Alley. During my tour of duty, I saved several drunks who bounced off the tanktops, from drowning for which I received no recognition or decorations...Similarly, I was hit in the head with a pool ball in a bar fight with a foreign power (Canada) and never received The Purple Heart.

Please keep these heavyweight credentials in mind when considering the validity of the following observations...I was also known within the SUBRON SIX Staff Office and around the Pier 22 dumpsters as ...ComAnimalLant.

I attended basic Submarine School at then, New London, well before the nukes found a way to set fire to the 150 foot steel tank full of water and burn the sonuvabitch down and well before they picked up the entire base and moved it to Groton...Somewhere during that move the White Hat Club fell off the truck and was lost forever, a historical fact lost to naval historians.

When I attended Smokeboat School, nuclear propulsion was fairly new and the jury was still out on whether it would last or go the way of the hoola-hoop, Davy Crocket hats, Kaiser automobiles, Playtex girdles and Tom Mix. There was also ongoing research into sterility and penis shrinkage due to loose radioactive stuff roaming around in nuke boats. We were all told about the rampant epidemic of radioactive penis shrinkage sweeping Rickover's steel submersible riders...moonbeam crank miniaturization syndrome.

You must bear this in mind when you realize the risk I accepted when I visited the USS Toledo (SSN-769). Sterility was not a concern, having been surgically eliminated from

consideration in the 1970s. Pregnancy at our address would either be accompanied with the appearance of a "yonder star" and the visitation of Three Wisemen..... or the shooting of a postman, Washington Post delivery boy or the VEPCO meter reader.

But penis shrinkage would present major problems because my original design spec did not leave me a whole lot of material with which to make unscheduled contributions to the Goddess of Nuclear Radiation.

Please keep all this in mind as I continue.

During the 40th Anniversary of SubVets at Groton I had the opportunity to visit the USS Toledo (SS-769), a modern marvel of seagoing space age technology where we were told..."The rubber meets the road"...(That's nuke talk and like damn near everything explained to us that day on board that Buck Rogers sonuvabitch, something I didn't understand.)

It was like Cro-Magnon man meeting Obi-Wan-Kenobi....I smiled a lot...nodded...said "Humm", "Wow" and "I'll be damned" a lot but didn't understand a whole helluva lot about all of the Wizard of OZ stuff, I was shown.

They assembled us in front of the USS Nautilus (SSN-571) Museum underneath two giant steel rings that may possibly have been the Jolly Green Giants mother's I.U.D. They loaded us on vans and hauled us down to the Lower Base and down to The USS Toledo, a nukeboat undergoing post deployment upkeep.

The pier was mostly spotless. Yes, there were a few pieces of gear that had been off loaded for pick-up and remote calibration and repair...and yes, there were a couple of technician's tool gang boxes near the brow. Joe Roche mentioned that he had seen heavier tools used by dentists, eye doctors, guys who fix Rolex watches and gay guys who pack lingerie at Victoria Secrets.

The first folks we came in contact with were blue jackets wearing Marine green camouflaged uniforms. The green camouflage was a bright decision. Everything within a square mile was painted "number seven, navy gray" so the woodland camouflage blended right in. The Toledo had a boatload of tubes, hoses and cables running into it...The damn thing looked like it was on mechanical life support...sorta like Carol Anne Quinlin. And everywhere were these guys running around in Jarhead commoflage uniforms.

"Pardon me sir, are you a tree?, a bush?, a lost duck hunter?, a two legged poison ivy plant with a riot gun? or a topside watch with Marine induced submarine duty, buyers' remorse?"

"I am a defender of the American way of life and sentinel of the free world who signs for doughnuts, spare parts, classified communications... who hustles drunks aboard in

strange places and shoots anything running down the Lower Base road waving something with a flaming fuse, yelling..."Praise Allah."

They checked our picture I.D., (Gene Autry Range Rider cards were unacceptable...anything else with your picture on it, was pretty much okay. Ron 'Warshot' Smith pulled out a folded piece of paper previously posted on the wall of a post office in Juarez Mexico indicating that he was worth several hundred thousand Mexican pesos alive or dead. It was accepted because Warshot explained that it was "an official government document.")

A very high speed, hyperactive Chief was introduced to us. This guy operated at a level just below the speed of light. I think he was either the manager of the Flying Walendas, the ringmaster of a three-ring circus at a lunatic asylum or on dope. Having said that, he was a very knowledgeable guy who was one of the most positive motivators I had ever seen. Everyone we came in contact with, praised his "people skills", leadership and overall competence. In the term used in my day, he was CrackerJack in all respects.

This man, the Toledo Chief of the Boat (COB), turned my group over to a senior Chief who took us into the big iron monster.

Nuke boats don't stink of fuel oil, dirty laundry, the gifts from inboard poop tank venting, rancid armpits...stinking feet and the airborne residue of massive cigarette incineration. All language used aboard would be most appropriate in any convent or Girl Scout Camp. It is in every sense of the term, a far more gentlemanly force today....and far cleaner and shipshape.

Nobody uses the universal all applicable, Chinese submarine adjective "fookein", I didn't hear anyone ask if any one had seen "that fookein sonuvabitch", when referring to some misplaced tool or personal article, missing gear or clothing. Nobody asked the cook to tell him."what's for fookein chow?"....or,"Horsefly, get your fookein foot off my fookien toe."

As what appears to be some kind of budgetary cost saving measure, the United States Navy has eliminated all "fookein" gear and there is a massive shortage of "gahdam sonuvabitches" and things that "if they were up your ass, you would know where they were." Nobody was told that it was probably in the lost shit locker or in the gear adrift lucky bag. The word "Snotlocker", as in, "How would you like a shot between your running lights, right in the gahdam snotlocker?"is no longer found in the sanitized vocabulary of your Rickovarian boatsailor. The word nose is now substituted. Nobody in Ships Company, hits the beach to get "Bent-On", "Two-blocked" or "Get alongside some honey". Men go ashore to locate a possible love interest leading to eventual matrimony...or some starry-eyed pigtailed sweetheart to take to a marshmallow roast or Wednesday Night Tent Meeting...Nobody returns to the boat and has to wake up the Corpsman for a penicillium shot to ward off strange illnesses of the lower torso received as a good-bye gift from some darling who sold her "Alohas" in a returning cab for ten bucks a shot.

Nobody yells, "Gangway one-eyed marine with a baby, comin' through," to clear a passage way, or yells "Hot Stuff...make way."

Folks, it's a different world inside one of those big steel pixie dust powered contraptions.

Over the years and especially following the advent of nuclear powered propulsion the vocabulary of the submarine service changed. Some would say it decidedly improved. They would be English teachers, old maids and all the ladies in your mother's garden club.

Words sounding like rasserfracting dyno agitating dipthermic fasticulation fiznoid and pre percolating doo-dad urggastulation whizza-ma-rig...became the norm and "that gahdam whatcha-ma-callit" and "that check valve globe reducing sonuvabitch" were consigned to the obsolete phraseology locker.

The guys aboard Toledo might have been speaking mandarin Yugoslavian as far as I was concerned. I speak fluent 1950s seaman first and have never visited the planet Pluto or nuke school. So if you think this talk is going to involve a highly sophisticated discussion on the technical capabilities of the USS Toledo, you'd better start fishing for your car keys.

The Chief told us..."Yes, some of the guys still hotsack". Friends, hotsacking on a monster nuke is like having to take seconds on a nap with Candice Bergan. You've gotta see the bunks on a nuke...privacy curtains, a headset to listen to music of your personal selection...bunks arranged in little communal rat maze compartments like small civic associations. It wouldn't surprise me if Chiefs and above got issued those Magic Fingers beds they have at the Red Roof Inn.

Nobody was off watch laying on a sweat soaked, stinking flash pad...smoking an Old Gold, Pall Mall or filter-tip Picayunes, reading "The Sexual Exploits of Swamp Woman" or "The Nymphomaniac Queen of the South Seas" and scratching his athletes foot "split-toed" on a bunk chain...while the duty Corpsman held sick call in Hogans Alley and lanced putrid butt boils three inches from the poor bastards nose.

The control room looks like something NASA built. Everything has been miniturized. The Chief of the Boat told us a cocker spaniel could trim the boat and frequently a trained cockatoo stood underway Diving Officer watches.

They have plasma screens all over the boat and docking stations in damn near every compartment. The computers allow a lad to exchange unlimited e-mail with the folks back home...download exotic porno and place bets on horse races in Argentina.

The plasma screens can be used for numerous things...giving PowerPoint presentations to the entire crew, conducting underway shipboard training, watching downloaded satellite images and commercial programming, and most importantly, used

to relay periscope imagery of extremely large busted women getting out of very expensive cars at the base Officer's Club.

Wardroom chairs weigh as much as a tractor-trailer truck full of bridge rivets or the after high turret on the Iowa. The Senior Chief told us that wardroom furniture is used for underway weight lifting during Richard Simmons exercise sessions. Actually the added weight prevents them from sliding around during boat gyrations and slight angle operations. During extreme angle ops, there are small hinged arms that hook into padeyes attached to the Wardroom Table that allow the officers chairs to be fastened securely and prevent them from taking off, roller coaster style.

The Chief took us down a starboard side passageway. They had sonar-monitoring equipment in that passageway that could hear ticks burping in Uganda. They had screens with lines and squiggly looking bullshit that we were told were visual manifestations of acoustic analysis that could differentiate between extremely quiet enemy combatant craft and when in the Indian Ocean could intercept the sounds originating from Osama Bin Laden's nose hair growth.

A nuclear submarine like Toledo should be number one on any listing of modern technical marvels. It is the latest product of proven methodology, state of the art, cutting edge technology and culmination of one hundred years of submersible craft refinement, research and development. The USS Toledo embodies that tradition and has incorporated within its hull, the latest manifestations of our most advanced weapons system deployed in the world today.

All ships have a personality. Some good, some lousy and some colorless, non entities. There are boats that, when their names and hull numbers come up in conversation, make everyone smile. The USS Toledo is such a boat. That became evident as we toured the boat. You don't have to understand the whiz-bang up to date technology to recognize high morale, first rate leadership and well trained bluejackets, with evident pride in the skipper, the crew and the Boat. In the old days, the term "Happy Crew" would be used to describe the crew of the 769.

I've been in highly recommended restaurants...triple A four star "feed your face" establishments that wouldn't measure up to the Toledo's messdeck. Clean, comfortable and appeared extremely well managed. That is one of the best indicators of a sharp boat in a world inhabited by E-3's.

The first thing an old smokeboat rider recognizes is the absence of roaches, salami hanging from vent operating handles, no potato lockers (also checked the showers...no spuds in there). I applied my junior Dick Tracy Super Detective skills and came to the conclusion that the modern day boatsailor doesn't smoke, drink, cohabit with flatbacking professional ladies, operate slush funds, use sea stores smokes and skin books as the basis of the ship's barter system, steal white hats, piss in the suction side of the bilge strainers during battle stations...He doesn't have to acclimate himself to oil slicks floating in the coffee, rolls of GDU bags hanging from overhead ventilation lines,

cases of canned goods stored in passage ways, behind racks, in the waterways, outboard engines...heads that smell like a Karachi, Pakistan bus station public restroom... and no one yells "open the bulkhead flappers" before farting. The lower enlisted elements, "the bottom feeders" weren't going around wearing ratty hand-me-down foulweather gear, with names like "Stinky", "Wingnut" and "Texas Ted" handwritten on the back....and greasy, hydraulic oil stained inverted raghats are no longer in vogue when strolling the lower base piers or being sported simply to piss off shore duty based CPOs.

It is a new boatservice. More visually professional, vocabulary raised to a level acceptable at a church supper, no grabass, a lot of shined shoes, a helluvalot more gentle...No Chief wild boar look-a-likes with tattoos of nekkit Chinese girls riding porpoises, lotsa gold rates and hashmarks...(I never remember any submarine qualified CPO with anything but red rates and hashmarks when I was in...Well, maybe a suspected homosexual Yeoman up at DesLant...but nobody down around Pier 22). Folks say "pardon me sir" instead of planting a size 12 brogan square in your ass. No place to plant your butt topside after chow to catch a smoke, watch the sun go down and swap verbal bullshit with your shipmates.

It's different...that may well be the understatement of the century. Make no mistake, the USS Toledo is the most impressive ship I've ever seen. It didn't take me long to figure out that I woudn't make a good pimple on a Toledo sailor's butt...that's a God's honest fact.

But, I left the boat still as deeply in love with the USS Requin (SS-481) as I have ever been. The old girl gave me bucking bronco rides in the North Atlantic...rocked me to sleep during aimless, go nowhere night steaming on station, and took me out and back, safely. She gave me sunrises and sunsets out where seagulls could crap on you and not on a plasma screen hooked up to the Mister Rogers "Let's see what's happening in the topside neighborhood" contraption.

I rode the old girl at a time and place, in the continuous chain of submarine history when a member of ships company could poke his head around the After Battery airlock door and yell..."What's for fuckin' chow?" And there was no Martha Stewarts Mate to care.

I rode smoke belching cantankerous sonuvabitches, when there were Gunners Mates, Torpedomen, Signalmen, Quartermasters, Stewards and tattooed CPOs.

I rode them when the cigarette smoke in the control room got so damn thick you couldn't see the gahdam air manifold operator and it was okay to wire a tuna can ashtray to the shallow water gauge bracket.

Nuclear powered submarines are very clean and odorless. There was a scuttlebutt in a passageway. The water didn't have the typical iguana bladder taste or leave a petroleum

rainbow film on your tongue. And messdeck coffee is served in little white Styrofoam cups. To an E-3, that's progress at a level he can appreciate.

Nobody has to jackass torpedoes anymore. No getting the overgrown bastards into the tubes by block and tackle and two pints of human sweat...They have automatic doo-dahs that load them and a hydraulic system that operates like some kind of lever-action Winchester, to effect reloads.

And they carry missiles and Master Missile Wizards have replaced the TMs. The way the weapons systems appear to operate these days, the gunnery gang must spend a lot of time standing around like the Maytag repairman.

The advance of undersea warfare technology has far outpaced my level of comprehension.

When I was an eleven year old Scout, my patrol leader, a kid named Charlie Bartlett explained how sex worked, using the insertion instructions out of his older sister's box of Tampax. We knew that that little piece of folded paper contained all that we needed to fully understand the complete intricacies and mysteries of sex and baby fabrication. It was as if we were beholding a very important part of the Dead Sea Scrolls...The Rosetta Stone of the Female Goodie Locker...the unraveling of the Open Sesame of the Forbidden Fruit storage bin.

The only problem we had, involved the instructional narrative accompanying the cutaway anatomical diagram. On that tiny piece of paper, which was strictly geared to poking the things in and extracting them, nothing made a damn bit of sense to an eleven year old. It was like having yo-yo trick instructions and you had never seen a yo-yo up close.

You are probably saying to yourself..."What in the hell does that have to do with the subject at hand?"

As I stood in the control room of the Toledo looking at all that gear, I couldn't recognize anything that I got signed off on in 1959 or 60. I might have just as well been in the central power generating plant on the planet Mongo...suddenly I knew exactly what a June bug trapped in a pinball machine feels like. I was a kid again looking at the anatomical schematic layout of the female inner sanctum so intricately laid out by the folks who made tampons and wondering how in the hell and where in the hell the baby manufacturing process took place.

I was in the hands of a Senior Chief who knew everything about nuke boats and I "had left my brain in the hip pocket of my other pants".

Everything was extremely complicated and required three years of physics, a basic understanding of nuclear power generation and an abstract math and chemistry background at the M.I. T. graduate level.

I was lost...I didn't want to show my ignorance so I let them lead me along the intestinal track of that exotic beast and when the Chief said..."Any questions?" I tried not to look like I was too damn stupid to formulate an intelligent question. To be honest...if I had been captured by some "to be named later" enemy and they used some diabolical torture method...like say...strapping me in a chair and having to listen to Joan Rivers for over an hour to get me to explain what I saw aboard the Toledo...National Security would be safe except for a detailed description of Hatch hinges, Styrofoam cups and those big ol' overstuffed lounge chairs the guys who steer the boat, plant their butts in. Beyond that, I felt like I was going through Willie Wonka's Chocolate Factory.

One thing became evident the farther we went in the boat. The cement that binds the Toledo crew together is mutual professional respect. There's a feeling you get when you see a pro ball team make a triple play...three guys set up a complicated hockey goal or one of those unbelievable trapeze tricks.

You say to yourself, "Horsefly they make it look easy." Making damn difficult stuff look easy is what true professionals do. If that's the case... the Toledo sailors who took time to show a lot of old coots around, were true pros.

I saw no evidence that acey-doucey, hearts or Hollywood, "tenth of a cent a point" gin-rummy, were played aboard ship...no acid-eaten dungarees...no frayed raghats, no officers with great big greasy rags hanging out of their hip pockets. There are no lines of human ants jackassing all manner of substance rations across the pier from the tender. One very probable reason for this is, there are no more tenders. Hearing that there were no more tenders, I couldn't help wondering where E-3 Leading Seamen went to steal the stuff they needed.

The old adage went, "You can steal anything from a tender that was small enough to fit in a mail bag." In my day, that was the most important link in the Sub Force supply system...Tender Theft.

The whole damn ship seems to run itself, do absolutely incredible things and accomplish miracles.

The enlisted men change light bulbs, eat, sleep, use the head, send each other e-mail, take visitors through the ship, wear clean, very fashionable clothes, and re-enlist.

Nobody cusses, smokes, goes around with a skin book in their hippocket... It is no longer fashionable for enlisted idiots to fasten halyard clips loaded with keys to a starboard belt loop, play hearts for money, serve on the board of directors of the local branch of the Saltwater Savings and Loan (A long ago euphemism for the boats totally illegal crew funded "Ten'll get you twelve" floating loan office run out of a cigar box in the goat locker.

Nobody sits around in the messdeck drinking coffee and telling stories about drunken shipmates peeing out of a tenth floor hotel window near La Rochelle, on French cops or fist fights in liberty launches off the Italian coast.

Above all, the inside of a nuke smells like a new car rather than an orangutan armpit. You can bring your mother on board on Mothers' Day to meet your wardroom and shipmates without having to fear that she will return home and tell her bridge club that her boy lives in a seagoing septic tank.

To be honest, too much time has elapsed between my era in the boat service and the fast paced advance of undersea technology. It was like someone gently taking away a caveman's axe and handing the dumb bastard a bazooka.

The place looked like everything found in all the Radio Shacks and Circuit Citys on the East Coast had been jammed in there. The whole boat looked like the inside of a pinball machine.

I was a lost ball in the high weeds... I thought the nukes had a whole lot of spare room...empty space. I'm glad my wife didn't go into that contraption, She holds the North American record for cramming stuff in a closet, but the damn Toledo has her beat. You couldn't get another piece of gear in the Toledo's control room even if you Crisco'ed the sonuvabitch and tried to hammer it in with a twelve pound sledgehammer.

Of course, most of the stuff aft of the messdeck was "shoot you dead" secret. That's probably where the dog track and nine hole golf course is.

The quality of the head paper has improved. The stuff must have been butt tested by Tinkerbelle. The old smokeboats got toilet paper made out of old reprocessed dump truck brake linings. The stuff was a metamorphic state of plywood...you didn't wipe - you sanded.

It is a kinder, gentler sub force. There are no more tenders, no sleazy strip of pawnshops, tattoo joints, uniform shops and naval tailors found on the roads leading to the Base. The old Dealy Center geedunk is now a plastic food, McDonalds. They don't have Mardi-Gras looking used car lots where some guy named Crazy Eddie wants to sell you freshly painted clunker for low lifetime payments, that end when the embalming fluid kicks in.

No trip to the Mecca of submarining would be complete without a trip to Banks street...ah, Banks Street...the New England version of a naval sin franchise, former venue of Seven Brothers...the Gambini Brothers' bar. After the death of one brother, known to boatsailors' as "Seven Brothers and a Ghost."...The Premier Boatsailor's Watering Hole.

Folks, you wouldn't know Banks Street...It's full of little boutiques, antique emporiums, little book stores and some kind of gay hangout. Halfway down the street, there was a

thrift store...they had this blond female manikin in the window. She, the manikin, was wearing this wedding dress...it had slipped off the manikin's shoulder and one breast was exposed ...It was a message sent from the Goddess of the Main Induction...saying "I shall return" ala Douglas MacArthur. At 63, it was a matter of complete indifference to me. My interest in breasts not covered in my most recent joint tax return would be strictly from the point of artistic appreciation and anatomical configuration admiration.

The bad thing about generational change is that if you do not respect the longstanding traditions, there are disconnects between the old long ago sonuvabitches and their downline whizkid successors. I found it impossible to connect with the life I knew. That is not a complaint, just a statement of regrettable fact. Too much water has flowed under too many bridges since I got my Dolphins pinned on a wet dungaree shirt....And yes, pinning a qualified submariners Dolphins on a wet shirt after his mates have tossed him over the tanktops into the waters of the slip where his boat is moored, is another tradition lost along the way.

There is nothing aboard the modern marvels, I am intellectually capable of understanding...I feel the same way about the space shuttle, modern surgery, computer chips and all the rules of ice hockey...programming T.V. recording devices...and what kind of magic they put in Viagra.

I am glad I served when I did for a number of reasons, not the least of which would be the sunrises and sunsets stored in the depths of my heart that I often replay on cold winter nights...listening to the old magnificent bastards of the Pacific War tell tales of kicking Hirohito's butt from '42 to '45 over great meals in a rolling and pitching messdeck...rocking and rolling around in North Atlantic swells...drinking coffee with a hydraulic oil slick floating in it and sharing space with most of God's cockroaches.

Hell, I wouldn't know what to do in a fresh smelling boat, absent cigarette and cigar smoke...or standing watch in a control room where the watch standers were more interested in differential calculus, thermodynamics and twenty foot long algebra equations than big-busted barmaids with loose panty elastic.

I wouldn't like buying shoe polish, multi function calculators and underway reading material suggested by the Bureau of Naval Mind Expansion. I wouldn't want any kid I went to elementary school with, knowing I ever wore anything called a "poopie suit", because saying "you wore a poopie suit...you wore a poopie suit" would call for a mandatory playground butt whipping.

But the worst part about being a sailor today is that it would rob me of telling people, especially my grandchildren... that once upon a time...long, long ago I served in Arleigh Burkes Navy...something I would be honored to have carved on the chunk of rock I'm buried under.

Every man should be proud of his era of service and I am proud of my choice of the United States Submarine Service and the honor of being allowed to serve and qualify aboard the boat I rode and riding with the crews, wardrooms and skippers I served with.

But anyone who failed to recognize the quality and level of competence of today's submariner, both officers and men, would be a damn idiot. I was very impressed with the CPOs and especially the Chief of the Boat on Toledo.

The COB is a very special man. Every raghat that ever rode submersible steel recognizes a good COB when he comes across one...and I would be proud to go to sea aboard the USS Toledo. Why in the hell they would want an idiot like me would be another question...and a mystery of epic proportions.

Sea Stories by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Sea stories hold a unique niche in the annals of verbal and written history and legend.

They all have a basis in fact and must be told or written in the language of seafarers in terms and idiom only they understand, involving incidents and situations only men who have lived the life can fully understand and appreciate.

They are best told in the company of sailors in dimly lit bars, over cheap beer and tobacco smoke. The only other thing in life that remotely resembles sailors swapping sea stories would be a major league Horse Manure Taco Luau.

The crafting of sea stories never involves outright lying...the proper term is 'truth manipulation'. All truth is pliable...plastic. God makes plastic truth so that his bluejackets can fashion yarns that entertain men who spend a lot of time broke, drinking beer and sniffing barmaid perfume.

You cannot take 'Sea Story Studies 101' at Yale, Princeton, Harvard or the Correspondence Institute for Heavy Machinery Mechanics. To become proficient, one must serve an apprenticeship under a master seagoing bullshit artist. A naval bullshit artist is not a liar...he is a man who treats the content of cow pies as the Playdough of naval history.

Most of the master submarine sea story crafters in the *Deep Draft Institute Hall of Fame* are diesel boat sailors. The reason is, that acceptable subject matter was drastically reduced when the sub force adopted the gentlemanly sensitive approach, recalled all the Cro-Magnon behavior manuals and made the lower enlisted elements climb down out of the trees.

It is probably beyond the comprehension of today's totally squared away force but there was a day when a hug and pat on the ass was a perfectly acceptable way to greet a

WAVE and you could spend the weekend with one, without worrying about the residue of your very personal body fluids ending up in some naval investigative DNA lab.

The recounting of sea stories requires...no, make that demands...saltwater apprenticeship. You cannot learn the delicate balance between seawater and bullshit at Yale, Harvard, Columbia and Dartmouth, or from Martha Stewart on TV. No, you have to have smelled wet hemp, diesel smoke, rancid armpits, dirty socks, spoiled eggs, state five sea vomit, inboard vent emissions, and three day old cigar smoke. You have had to live a life where all of your earthly possessions could fit in your mother's breadbox.

The recounting of sea stories is an art...an art learned in dark locations illuminated by neon Budweiser signs, where you can hear Johnny Cash, the clink of pool balls and the crunchy sound that empty SlimJim wrappers make when you step on them.

They involve locations most people never heard of and subject matter that would have your Aunt Tillie's Altar Guild grabbing smelling salts. Very few sea stories were ever made into Little Golden Books or Disney movies. Sailors are among the few people who can watch a program about the tribal sexual practices of the inhabitants in a remote region of South Borneo on the Discovery Channel and yell,

"Me'n Jack had her and her sister."

Some jaybird once sent me an e-mail and said,

"You lie a lot."

He must have been some kind of deductive genius. I tried to explain that unlike Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, I wasn't writing some kind of New Testament sequel...just the semi-coherent ramblings of a long ago bluejacket and his tribute to a lost way of life he loved. I just want men I respected, and shared lousy air and Spam with, to be alive once more. I have found that you can resurrect the dead with a damn ballpoint. That is one of life's most wonderful gifts.

There is a writer of sea stories,who can best be described as a creator of classical bluejacket literature. That would be Mike 'Boy Throttleman' Hemming. Mike's writing is the kind poetic song of the soul that makes English teacher's smile and take pride in the cultivation of his gift. Mine on the other hand, make my English teachers try not to hit their shoes when they heave their lunch.

Please don't reference anything in this lucky bag of contrived bullshit if you are writing important stuff that requires historical accuracy. What this is, is one screwball's memories of Pier 22 life painted from a bull turd pallet simply for guys who were there and shared the magic.

It's about the boat sitting out in a Pennsylvania fresh water river getting her diapers changed regularly by people who never danced the North Atlantic fandango with her or

loved her with the ardor of youth. It's about her lads...the guys who only had her hull numbers 481 as their street address. They were, are and will always be, family.

Most of all, writing sea stories is fun... great fun. Over the past five years, I have spent many enjoyable evenings sitting alone in our family room shuffling through my memories...a cavalcade of faces, voices, experiences and time spent pissing against the wind.

As every true sailor knows, there is honor in remembrance and it is through the continually Brasso'ed memories of 'long in the tooth' old worn out sailors, that ships, long ago struck from Navy rolls, live on. They live on via the immortality of the sea stories told about them in circles of men who loved them and give a damn.

Shelly, Keats, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Louisa May Allcott never wrote sea stories or told them. Guys like 'Brass Knuckle' Jackson, 'One Nut' Daniels and 'Cinderblock' Williams tell sea stories. Shelly, Keats and the rest of that silk-skivvied crowd never pissed off a pier waiting on a liberty launch or dropped his watch in a rubber and tied a knot in it to waterproof it prior to swimming to boat swinging the hook 400 yards offshore, after the last launch had made her rounds.

Serious publishing houses don't publish sea stories because most naval historical authorities look on them as worthless and having absolutely no literary merit...and the bastards are probably right.

No hand that ever held a heaving line, chipping hammer or a GDU wrench, ever wrote anything they made a \$20-a-copy book out of...except Ron 'Warshot' Smith and, and Ken 'Pig' Henry...and maybe one or two others. Most of the authoritative writing is done by officers who understand the need for sterling silver napkin rings and how to drink 100 year old brandy from a snifter...and never drank 'dollar-thirty a gallon' wine out of rinsed out peanut butter jar in the superstructure forward of the bow plane bull gears.

My favorite critic, Tom 'Old Gringo' Parks, an old Pre-World War II S-Boat Motor Mac said it best...

"Dex, your stories are great for one good sit down head call."

Old Gringo fully understood the value of sea stories.

Those Who Sail Beneath the Swells by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

In every generation, the navies of the world always seem to find the necessary number of that 'special breed of man' needed to man their undersea ships... Those truly magnificent fools with the requisite pride and spirit of adventure needed to voluntarily crawl into an iron cylinder full of similar mental defectives and take the contraptions to sea.

I can't speak for the rest of the Navy. The only 'rest of the Navy' I ever met, were perpetual shore duty shore patrols. Looking back I can't remember one positive interaction I had with any sonuvabitch sporting an SP armband. The last thing they were interested in, in the old days, was spreading goodwill.

My entire short-lived naval service career was spent with like-minded jaybirds who actually liked going to sea in what closely resembled a sinkable septic tank.

I actually thought that to be a sailor, one had to go to sea. Sailing had to involve stuff like seagulls, saltwater and large metal objects that were painted gray, displaced tons of water and bounced around a lot in heavy weather.

How guys who interpreted photographs in a windowless building in Omaha, Nebraska called themselves sailors was way beyond the level of comprehension of a seventeen-year-old who cut his teeth on books about Pacific submarine action.

Lads who turned up at New London back in the 1950s weren't the kind of young men whose sense of naval adventure could be satisfied inventorying jocks and socks in some damn quonset hut in East Rat's Ass, Minnesota, or typing liberty cards at some shore station where they hot-patched weather balloons.

Submariners had no desire to belong to any organization that issued clothing designed to blend in with poison ivy plants... required you to dig holes and own a personal shovel... or any desire to eat unidentifiable food out of little green cans in the rain.

We liked hydraulic oil-laced coffee, crawling up on a pre-warmed flash pad and freely exchanging insults with men as equally ugly as ourselves. We enjoyed knowing that in any unscheduled altercation, our entire crew would show up to extract our drunken fanny and chastise those we had stirred up.

Back in the old days, (before any of you modern day techno undersea swashbucklers get a twist in your bloomers, I only know about the old days. I never rode anything that was intended to go below 412 feet or stay down for several months at a time.) So, as I started to say...

Back in the old days, the old leather-faced, hardboiled Chiefs used to say,

"Gahdam sailors belong on ships and ships belong at sea."

There was some kind of selection process that they put you through at New London that eliminated the fainthearted, the not totally committed, guys lacking desire to engage in intimate cohabitation with members of the opposite gender, communists, bedwetters, whiners, and anyone who entertained the slightest desire to be stationed in Omaha, Nebraska.

The system, God bless it, sorted out the true believers and packed the rest off to the surface fleet, Omaha and God knows where else.

And they put us on boats. A lot of us went to old, late in life, boats with combat histories. They were old World War II boats with racks, that once bunked our heroes... the men we wanted to be accepted by and to be exactly like.

We qualified and in so doing we joined the continuous chain that is and will always be the U.S. Submarine Force.

I don't know what the dreams and aspirations consist of for the young men of today. Ours was a far simpler time. We grew up chasing fireflies, shooting marbles, spinning tops, teaching each other yo-yo tricks, shooting each other with BB guns, playing two hands below the waist tag football, neighborhood kick the can and pick-up-game after school hardball. Nobody cried, tattled or went home to pee.

Back then, you didn't have to have made all 'A's in diathermic razz-a-ma-tazz physics or have a working understanding of the components in the formulation of the universe, to ride submarines.

You had to have an understanding of honor, loyalty, faithfully performed duty, obedience to command, respect for leadership, and total and absolute faith in your ship and shipmates.

Added to these qualities, a true boatsailor had to have a wide-screen sense of adventure and the same brand of curiosity that has lived in the hearts of those in every generation who ventured beyond known limits.

And you had love dancing with the devil. Somewhere, real major-league devil dancing got shot out the garbage gun.

But some things never change. It's still pitch black dark below 150 feet, a boat is always no farther than 9 miles from land (straight down) and the skipper's word is law.

And so far, every generation has worn the same insignia and nobody ever forgets the hull number of their qual boat or the name of their first COB.

There are many common denominators among the worldwide community of undersea sailors.

When the Kursk went down, I was struck and frankly dumbfounded by the genuine outpouring of sympathy for the families and loved ones of the lost boat sailors. To me, they had always been our enemy. Up to then, I had given no thought to the similarities found in our manner of service and the commonality of the danger of operating deep within a hostile environment surrounded by potential death on all sides.

Likewise, I never cease to be surprised by the way that submariners embrace their adversarial counterparts. There appears to be a universal acceptance with implied forgiveness of all German U-boat crewmen.

You never hear the term 'Nazi' U-boatmen. The term 'German' has become substituted for the term 'Nazi'.

America has a short national memory and everybody gets out of the penalty box in one generation.

I sat in a theater rooting for the former 'bad guys' in the film *DAS BOOT*. What we were seeing on the screen, was a boat full of sons of Hitler sneaking around and sinking our citizens. But the fact that we, having lived a similar life inside a recognizably similar pressure hull, elicited a sympathy and irrational forgiveness. In short, we related to both the characters and their circumstances.

I guess that in the final analysis, all submariners are brothers when you look into the depth of their souls.

That is good. In times of war, nobody who transits the surface of the world's oceans loves submarines.

Submarines and submariners are viewed as implements and practitioners of the black arts... backstabbing, bushwhacking sonuvabitches. We slip up from hiding below the waves and blow ships to pieces in a totally unfair, unsportsmanlike fashion. Any way you cut it, that's the way we made our living.

We black sheep... we predatory sharks... we saltwater sneaky Petes stick together.

We are a very small group when you consider the total world population and the percentage that never had any desire to crawl into a steel tank and sink out of sight.

Submariners, when all is said and done, are special unique people who are the only ones who truly understand each other and ever will.

The old warhorses who fought submarine wars are leaving us. These submersible sea dogs passed down the lethal reputation we carried and the awesome respect our boats were given.

I for one have been both honored and extremely proud to have been a part of this fine body of extraordinary adventurers and patriots.

'Submarine Man' by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I enter Washington,DC every morning from Virginia by way of the 14th Street

Bridge....and end up passing the intersection by the Bureau of Engraving and Holocaust Museum and Dept of Agriculture a minute to two minutes later. There's a homeless guy there named Andrew. Young fellow by the normally accepted stereotypical standard of hardcore bums and panhandlers.

He's got a beard about 18 inches long, a rats nest load of hair....a face that has been playing soap hookey for what may be years. His clothes are so ragged that they don't even qualify to be called rags...they are whatever the next step down from rags is called.

I normally give a negative response when approached by panhandlers...they simply piss me off. But I deeply respect a fellow with a good work ethic, and my Pal Andrew is ALWAYS there...faithfully selling both the WASHINGTON POST and WASHINGTON TIMES...rain, shine, earthquake, flood, snow, hail, fire storm...He's there. Only days he misses is when the other bums raid his "camp" beat him half to death and "Steal all my stuff."

There are mornings where he has stitches and eyes so puffed up he can barely see...but the poor sonuvabitch is there.

He saw my miniature Dolphins in my lapel one morning and I became "Submarine Man"...I give him on average \$5 every day (somewhere between \$3 and \$7)...for the utterly selfish reason that it makes me feel good to hear his..."God Bless You, Submarine Man." ...and know that he means it...and to know that he can at least afford the Double Chili Dog Special, with chips and Dr. Pepper the old Gypsy guy across the street, sells.

Sometimes when the light is red...we talk. He tells me that on the weekends he visits the Zoo to keep track of the progress of the twin white tigers born there last year....You ever want a white tiger twins update, see my pal Andrew. He has what can only be considered a beautiful life philosophy....I can't say if I can comprehend all of it because the only lessons I get are essentially less than one minute sound bites waiting for a green light. It's essentially a complete lifestyle patterned on a cross between the Golden Rule and The Sermon on the Mount...Don't laugh, he not only believes it but LIVES it.

He feeds squirrels....I know because I have bankrolled a helluva lot of peanuts during the winter and have seen him sitting on a park bench feeding his flock in the snow.

Solveig worries about him...One day, we got two wool blankets, a pack, eating utensils, a jackknife, a can opener, a bunch of cans of Hormel Chili, SPAM, Dinty Moore Beef Stew and Devilled Ham....plates, pans, a Sterno Stove (with twenty, two-hour Sterno cans) and a two-cell MAGlite. Solveig drove to work with me one morning and she sat in the middle seat in the mini-van and passed the blankets and loaded pack to Andrew when we stopped...

Two days later, the predatory homeless thieves found him sleeping in a corrugated cardboard box, beat the living hell out of him and stole everything. He was embarrassed

to tell me...So I said.."Forget about the nasty bastards.....Tell me what's happ'nin to the tiger twins...." And a great big smile came across his battered and blood caked face.."They're great...Their Mom is doing a great job with them."

Speaking of mothers...He's gotta have somebody somewhere that cares about him.....My Mother used to say, "There's a Christmas tree somewhere with a seat next to it for everybody."

It was raining like that old 'cow pissing on a flat rock' this morning...and he was there...soaked to the skin....smiling from under his sopping watch cap...

"Good morning Submarine Man.....God Bless You."

"God Bless you too, Andrew.....Here's seven bucks promise me you'll go to the Chinese Carryout and get a bowl of hot soup when he opens."

"I promise, Submarine Man."

The beat patrolman at Ag tells me that the kid does not use dope or drink...that he's just a free spirit who detached himself from planet earth fifteen years ago and his only intimate relationships and close associates are birds, squirrels and most of the residents of the National Zoo. Poor Andrew is the personification of the term "goodness".

Thanks for listening. Andrew's buddy...Submarine Man.

Off Watch at Sea by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The late night hours underway submerged became late in life gentle memories.

Night people have always been a different breed of cat. There's something kinda special about people who own the middle of the night...cab drivers; Waffle House waitresses; 'Dirty Apron Bill', the short order cook at the I-95 truck stop; and midnight shift highway patrolmen. Great people, great conversationalists...there are few competing distractions so you tend to pay more attention to what people say during the hours most folks are sleeping.

Coffee always tastes better when it has percolated to the point of massive liquid reduction...stuff one step above hot tar. Coffee that can pop rivet your eyelids to your eyebrows...a concoction resembling boiled Egyptian mummy wrappings or Pakistani bunion pads. Late night submarine, bottom of the pot midwatch, wake the dead, put hair on your chest jamoke can dissolve your adenoids.

But, you never forget it...and you never get any cup of coffee that matches submarine midwatch coffee the rest of your life.

When you turn in to an after battery rack...as you are corking off you can pick up bits and pieces of messdeck conversation as on duty crewmen pass through the crews' mess airlock door.

"Yeah...Mary told him to..."

Then the door would close.

"Back around 1952, my old man..."

And then the door would shut again. You never learned what his dad did in 1952. If it was one of those mid-western farm kids, his dad probably bought a damn hay baler or married some big, corn fed gal with John Deere tractor seat butt.

It was great layin' there in your hot sack rack picking up bits and pieces of late night 'Go nowhere' pass the time, revelations.

Every smokeboat sailor had those gentle memories.

Aft of the After Battery berthing compartment was the enlisted head.

Here you could pick up entire conversations from guys using the side-by-side, port and starboard sinks...or between some using the urinal and some socially convivial bluejacket with his butt parked on a freckle maker head seat.

"Hey Pete...That you?"

"Yeah...it's me...That you, Ralph?"

"It's me...Hey, when we pull in tomorrow morning, you got the duty?"

"Naw...Section Three has the duty...I'm in two."

"You hittin' the beach?"

"Yeah, if the COB opens the Saltwater Savings and Loan."

Note: Slush Funds were totally illegal and outlawed by the United States Navy...they operated far beyond anything remotely resembling Federal banking regulation, inspection or protection. It was a cross between an Aboriginal headhunters' credit union and the booty split of the brotherhood of pirates.

The Chief of Naval Operations and Secretary of the Navy had no idea of the complexity of E-3 finances and the periodic difficulty of financing a night of inebriated lust.

Our slush fund was run out of a beat-up 'Have-a-Tampa' cigar box in the COB's bunklocker. Every payday, the animals tossed five bucks in the box. You could borrow \$10.00 for \$11.00 or \$20.00 for \$22.00. Profits went to beer ball games, ships parties aft of the conning tower fairwater, Luaus, and flowers for deceased people...and one baby crib for a strapped E-3 new dad.

The Saltwater Savings and Loan was a great, faith based financial institution, that saved more submarine sailors than Billy Graham.

All night long, the lads on duty in the maneuvering room and both enginerooms sent men forward to get coffee.

Another set of sounds that originated from the crews' mess were the rattle of silverware being washed and the banging of pots, pans, aluminum trays and crockery. Messcooking was not a delicate art...the messcooks created racket like tossing horseshoes on a tin roof.

But the racket was a familiar sound...one of those comforting sounds that a boatsailor accepted as indicating all being right in the underwater environment in which he lived.

Every time someone passed through the watertight door from the forward engine room, you would get a momentary ear full of the pounding of a pair of Fairbanks-Morse 38D rockcrushers...then it would suddenly stop and you would hear the click of the spring loaded latch.

Some nights, cooks and messcooks would play hell with your sleep when they started rooting around the compartment in search of the location of specific canned goods needed for future meal preparation.

"Jeezus, what in the hell's going on?"

"Lookin' for some gahdam cans of beans."

"You gotta disturb a working sailor's sleep to find a couple of cans of lousy beans??"

"There isn't a sailor sleeping back here that would qualify as a working sailor on his best day."

"Yeah...nobody listens to a stupid, worthless canned food heater-upper."

"Mickey...don't bother to ask what's in the soup the next time yours tastes like somebody peed in it."

Nonsensical, go absolutely nowhere conversation between men who would have shown up for a kidney transplant if either needed one. The gentle, no malice bullshit that was the common coin of diesel submariners.

No narrative of the nocturnal activities of the underwater kingdom would be complete without mentioning the acid-eaten dungaree voltage ferrets...the main power electricians.

Those bastards would show up...open a manhole hinged door in the thwartships passageway and drop down into a world where they snaked around taking battery temperatures and topping the cells off with pure distilled water. In short, they feed the electron wizards that pushed us through saltwater below snorkel depth.

In my tour in the boats, I never met a bad electrician. They, like enginemen, machinist mates and other auxiliary rates were numbered among God's most generous people.

I have no idea what late night sounds a modern day sailor will carry with him into old age, but, I do know, having seen living conditions aboard the most recent classes of the modern high-tech submersibles, there are certain memories we will not share in common.

No modern day nuke rider will carry the memory of feet in stinking socks stepping on him on the way to an upper bunk just below an air conditioning condensate drip pan.

He won't have memories of waking up to a close-up view of a bare butt when the Chief Corpsman was conducting a sick call crab check in Hogan's Alley.

He won't remember the aromatic wonder fog that accompanies the venting of #2 Sanitary Tank Inboard.

He won't remember midwatch cheese sandwiches made from Navy contract self-healing, scab forming mayonnaise and sliced cheese that could patch a tractor tire blowout.

He, or maybe she in the not so distant future, won't leave the boatservice with memories of CPO dried armpit salt stains that would deflect a 20mm round.

Each generation will collect memories to pass on to downline generations.

These are mine...the ones I carry in my heart of wonderful times spent among the finest men I would ever know during the time I spent as an oxygen thief on this planet.

Owning One-Sixteenth of a Real Clunker

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Back in the days of 'Once upon a time...', back when submarines sucked fuel through a hose and their crews wore red lead and zinc chromate spattered dungarees, and non-rated personnel were paid less than the fellows who clean sewage plant filter screens...

Back in those days, bluejackets invented creative transportation. Namely, co-op joint ownership 'on its last legs' automotive transportation.

The crew on Requin had two jointly-owned pieces of four-wheel junk... A Studebaker known as the 'Hudson River Highway Whore' and the 'Requin Road Rocket'. The 'Rocket' was a '56 Ford.

Ownership consisted of a group of sailors, but for title, registration and insurance purposes, I have no idea how that was handled... Except that the yeoman gave any incoming mail concerning the two vehicles to a third class main power electrician, who shall remain nameless. My share in the 'Requin Road Rocket' cost me fifty bucks and ten dollars a month. We all shared parking ticket and maintenance expense.

The rattletraps were maintained through cumshaw motor pool transactions, junk yard purchases and donations from poker game winnings. Up in our J-50 barracks, after each hand the winner tossed fifty cents into a Planters peanut can.

We had auto mechanics out the kazoo... Enginemen, 'motor macs' (machinist mates)... Why, damn near every raghat on board had turned wrenches on an old jalopy or family car before being issued a seabag and dress blues.

Those 'four-wheel wonders' served many purposes. First, they were transportation... Cheaper than cabs and transported your butt from point 'A' to point 'B'. They got you out to the beach and back, out to the fast food and Chinese chow joints on Military Highway, made late-night pizza runs, and hauled us out to our Willoughby Spit 'Snake Ranch'.

But, more than that, most of the time our old clunkers sat parked in the pier head parking lot, leaking oil and reeking of stale cigarette smoke.

For an E-3 who spent 90% of his naval career living in a very small cast iron communal zoo, completely devoid of any vestige of privacy, it was a refuge of peace and quiet. You could go out there and read, or listen to the radio. You and a buddy could visit the geedunk wagon (aka 'roach coach'), buy a couple of those lumberjack boot-tough muskrat burgers, a small bag of greasy fries, go to your two-door sanctuary and listen to a little Johnny Cash and old Hank Williams. Nobody came to get you to load stores, handle lines or run stuff up to the radio shack on Orion. The United States Navy's jurisdiction came to a screeching halt at the door handles of our four-wheel invisible kingdom.

One night at the first Requin reunion, we were having a few beers in the lobby cocktail lounge. One of the wives asked,

"Anyone remember first night in? Husband has the duty? Sex in that rust bucket car in the parking lot?"

Several ladies with decidedly gray hair, smiled.

It was not uncommon to find evidence of personal birth control on the parking lot gravel or lovely Lucy's panties hanging from the rear view mirror. On one of the vehicle's 'Rig for getting underway' check-offs was 'Check the ashtrays for potentially embarrassing castaways'.

The cars filled up early before pro-football games. We'd get up to the Orion ship service and load up on pogy bait and geedunk, and haul out to the parking lot.

If you tried to listen to any kind of sports event or live broadcast on the messdeck R.B.O. radio, you can bet your ass that at some point the duty officer would show up and inform you that in fifteen minutes, the inboard boat in the nest would be shifting berth.

"Armstrong, Stuke, Badertcher, and two more of you will be needed topside to handle lines. Find the 'T' wrench for the forward capstan."

Every time the squadron scratched its ass, they needed at least five or six non-rated idiots.

By the time you got the boat resecured, lines taught and recleated, you had missed the game-winning hit, a fantastic punt return, or a game-reversing run of unanswered baskets. I missed damn near all of John F. Kennedy's inaugural speech to load stores going outboard to a boat getting ready for a northern run.

That's what made listening to the radio out in the pierhead parking lot far more enjoyable.

Another benefit was that you didn't have to listen to 'long in the tooth' old chiefs and senior petty officers tell you about great players and teams that existed way before your mother got pregnant. Nobody who slept in Hogan's Alley gave a rat's ass about Bronco Nagurski and Ty Cobb... or the old St. Louis Browns. Especially when the New York Giants and Y. A. Tittle were on the Bears' three-yard line.

The cars were great places to go and sleep when the deck apes were using pneumatic scalers. For those of you who have never had the benefit of trying to sleep with clowns working on the hull or ballast tanks of a submarine with air-driven tools, visualize sleeping in an empty oil drum while some idiot bastard pounds on it with a sledgehammer.

Painting Tanktops, Superstructure and Limber Holes

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Summer day... Shirtless, tanned bluejackets hanging over the side, brandishing hoes with straightened-out blades, scraping scum and sea grass off tank tops.

Twenty feet forward, two guys in the squadron paint punt would be grinding places where oxidation deterioration had started to establish a new colony. The same members of the topside gang would return to the freshly ground away locations and slosh 'rust inhibitors' like red lead and zinc chromate on them.

Submarines had a unique capability... 'List control'. We could, for lack of a proper lay term, lean the boat over on one side or the other, to expose the area of our ballast tank's waterline so we could clean, prepare and paint them.

I was up waiting on the inter-base jitney, that twenty-seat cattle wagon which ran between DES SUB (destroyer and submarine) piers. If you are old enough to remember the name of Hoppy's horse (Topper) and rode a boat in SUBRON SIX, you remember that navy-gray four-wheel bread box with the three seats that had the springs poking through the seat cushions... Grinding gears and a driver with arm tattoos of hula girls and an anchor. He was one ugly sonuvabitch and swore he was a retired BM First.

Well, I was atanding there waiting on the rattletrap express, when this midshipman walks up...

"Scuse me sailor, is this where you board the mobile base connector?"

"You talking about the NOB jitney?"

"The bus that goes between bases."

"Aye, sir."

You knew he was a new guy because he was wearing whites and nobody in his right mind climbed aboard that filthy cattle wagon without something to sit on, to keep from lousing up the seat of your trou. Most bluejackets either picked up a folder from the yeoman's shack to sit on, or simply stood up. I had grabbed a brown folder.

Chief Petty Officers have this impression that an E-3 standing at the jitney stop is planning to goof off and spend a non-productive morning joy-riding from base to base in a continuous chain of round trips... Which we did, from time to time.

However, if you stood there with a brown official folder... An empty, but very important looking genuine yeoman's shack folder, every CPO on the planet visually accepted that

there was no question you were 'squared-away' and on a fully justified mission beneficial to the operation of the United States Navy.

Actually, you didn't want to arrive for your geedunk appointment with the seat of your whites looking like you slid down a coal pile.

But, back to the midshipman.

Right as he arrived, the USS Cutlass (SS-478) starts listing over for pre-scheduled maintenance. The midshipman tapped me on the shoulder.

"Look at that ship! It has rolled over!"

"Aye sir, they do that sometimes. In fact, sometimes they roll over and turn upside down. It takes a couple of days to bring them right side up again and send divers down to get the scopes if they fall out."

One thing about being qualified, it gave you numerous opportunities to share your technical expertise with the general public.

But, back to the topside gang...

Once we got the tank tops prepared, we connected our paint pot up to the 225 lb. air line that was connected to the ships service manifold, forward of the conning tower fairwater. We mixed M.E.K. (Methyl Ethyl Keytone) with #7 navy gray paint, took a straightened out cotter pin and cleared the paint gun nozzle, and rigged the hose. We loaded the paint pot and passed the hose, loaded pot and paint gun over the side to the two jaybirds in the punt.

Submarine sailors, by the very nature of their duty, don't see a lot of sunlight. Submarine pressure hulls and several hundred feet of saltwater were about as good a level of sunblock as one could get... SPF 1000. At 400 feet, sunrise and sunset were regulated by electrical switch.

Summer topside maintenance gave shirtless animals doing the work, world class sunburns. Topside work was usually performed immediately following arrival from a 'run', a time when the topside gang was at its most vulnerable to epidermal incineration. The evening following a midsummer first day topside turn to, found seven or eight upright walking lobsters, moaning and groaning at the evening meal.

"Gahdammit, get yur hand off my shoulder!"

"The next guy who slaps me on the back will wake up on a damn funeral home slab!"

In a week or two, the shirtless topside monkeys looked like Key West cabana boys. We saved a fortune in todays' tanning parlor fees... But, we were fortunate in that our Chief

of Naval Operations did not allow submariners to bring skin cancer aboard his submarines.

After we got the tank tops painted, we ground out the edges of the limberhole openings and moved into the superstructure to wire brush pressure lockers, decking supports, exhaust lines, and all the rest of the below the walking deck gear. Once E-3s disappeared below the walking deck, red-blooded American 19 year olds discovered the operating advantages of the 'out of sight, out of mind' principle of human behavior. As long as you could produce simulated sounds associated with productive activity, you were home free.

I can remember once when I was messcooking, the Chief of the Boat came into the messdeck, drew a cup of coffee and fired up a rum-soaked crook. Above the compartment, my shipmates were goofing off in the shade next to the snorkel intake, reading skin books or corking off. One guy was beating on the induction piping with a chipping hammer, using random, theatrical blows.

The COB smiled.

"Listen to those bastards up there busting their butts."

"Aye chief, they don't come any better or more hard-working."

Somewhere up there was a book entitled *The Diary of a Twenty Year Old Nympho* and I was on the list circulating in Hogan's Alley to read it next.

We worked hard when we knew we had to... When the ship or the skipper truly needed to get something accomplished. However, there is something invented by the U.S. Navy based on the 'Idle hands are the Devil's workshop' principle... It is called, 'Make Work'. One of the most important requirements and professional qualifications of a chief petty officer, is the ability to create aimless 'make work'.

The idea behind 'make work' was that non-rated submariners left unengaged in chain gang projects would turn to a life of crime project intended to overthrow Latin American governments, hijack the tender for a joyride up and down the Elizabeth River, or organizing the Hampton Blvd. barmaids into a union.

Without the mature guidance of the naval chief petty officers, men who as E-6s, have staggered over the brow drunker than Hogan's goat, they wouldn't be able to keep the younger members of ship's company from plundering Honduras, looting CINCLANT, or setting fire to the rest of the planet. CPO hats destroyed the brain cells controlling their E-3 memories.

I rag on chief petty officers... That's what E-3s do. But I would be the first to say that much of the character of the man I became was hot-forged into my heart, spine and

thoughts by some damn fine chiefs and leading qualified petty officers. Chiefs had to ride herd on rambunctious lads... I was one.

As a former leading seaman on an old Tench class boat, I'm proud of how we maintained her. A downline skipper of the boat told me that my band of deckapes did a crackerjack job. We did.

Working Girls by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

If you were the mother of young lady within a fifty-mile radius of a submarine anchorage, a pool shooting, beer swilling, line handling, paint-chipping sonuvabitch did not look like a hot marriage prospect. The fair girls of Norfolk were more inclined toward lads who understood that a slide rule had more uses than to stir jungle punch in a galvanized bucket.

So if you were a red-blooded American North Atlantic bluejacket, you either had to consign yourself to monastical life of self-imposed celibacy, or dabble in the world of commercial lovemaking. It was either that, turn queer or start winking at furry critters.

That brings us to what I have always felt were the most misunderstood and wrongly stereotyped class of girls on earth... The pierhead working girl.

I'm not talking about the organized crime whore, the pimp sponsored prostitute or the "My husband is in the Med" hobby whore. I'm talking about the barmaid or little gal from East Jeezus, North Carolina who dropped her bloomers for the brass Balboas it took to put together a down payment on a mobile home... Gal who would toss in a freebie if your boat pulled in late Friday night when the disbursing office was closed until Monday... The girls you gave all your money to before shoving off. Girls who knocked big dents in the lonely world of E-3 boatsailors.

"Hey sailor, how 'bout a fifteen dollar hobby horse ride?"

"Darlin' sounds' great... Hell, I can get my laundry outta hock Tuesday."

They weren't fancy... They sure as hell weren't sophisticated, but any history of the diesel boat service that didn't include their great contribution to America's Cold War victory would be chronically flawed by the ungrateful sin of omission... And the author would be either a fellow who missed a wonderful part of service in submarines or a despicable hypocrite. They costumed themselves in plastic barets, black lace pop-up bras, high heels and fancy lace panties. They would give you a tantalizing peek-a-boo as a preview of coming attractions... pre-release advertising known in the trade as a 'tantalizer'.

We all remember them 'Peggy', 'Dixie', 'Tiger' and the rest. We bought 'em beer and gave 'em jukebox change. We told them our stories, patted their fannies and they took us in like stray cats.

We weren't the first. It went back a long time. An old World War II Torpedoman told me that in those days it was "Three dollars for three minutes" and you had to stand in line. In the ensuing years, the rates had gone up and you didn't have to stand in line. But cab fare and cash layout for the room and a hot shower, had worked their way into the equation.

They weren't old hardcase veterans who had become cynical, worn and heartless. They were bouncy-bouncy, full of life kids who truly liked idiots who rode submarines. Most of them left after they bankrolled whatever it was they were dropping their bloomers for. One gal announced that she had her tuition for "hairdressing school" and bought us a round, tossed a quarter in Bells' jukebox and kissed us goodbye.

"Hey Jack... Did you ever run with her?"

"Yeah, she was different... Used to finish you off then try'n sell you stuff outta 'n Avon catalog... Some kind of scaly skin oil... After shave that smelled like the inside of a French girls lingerie drawer... And deodorant. Bought some of that damn deodorant... Got my armpit hair all wrapped around the gahdam roller ball so I shot the sonuvabitch out the GDU."

"She seemed nice enough... What was her name?"

"We just called her the Avon Lady... The guys off the Runner called her Alice."

They were a part of it. They knocked the edge off of being a long way from folks who knew you or had any idea what you were up to. They taught you the value of human companionship. And if you were any part of a worthwhile man, you never forgot them and what it felt like to wrap your peacoat around one who came down to Pier 22 to tell you goodbye.

Ladies, I truly hope you got what you were looking for and that life has been as good for you as you made it for us. You were a piece of our screwball history.

Submarine professional ladies... A very important part of After Battery history... Maybe the best part.

Officers... The Gentlemen Forward

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Only met... Make that served with, one bad officer. He was an ensign who suffered from one helluva case of retarded maturity. In the words of the skipper,

"The lad needed time to do a little growing up."

The captain put him on the pier. I don't know who was on the receiving end of that transfer, but I sure felt sorry for the poor bastards.

The rest of the officers I served under were first rate... Very professionally competent gentlemen... Or so it always appeared to me, an individual at the absolute anchor-end of the boatservice food chain. I have always been proud of the quality of individual who rode forward on my boat. That's not patronizing bullshit... At this stage of the game, honesty doesn't bring light-duty chits or constitute ass-kissing.

There were two kinds of officers... The 'engaged' and the 'disengaged'. Some officers, for very understandable reasons, maintained their distance from the lads aft. To them, the old adage 'familiarization breeds contempt' or at the very least an erosion of awe and respect forced the situation.

Looking back, I find that to have been pure bullshit. Through the looking glass of forty years of maturity, I realize that I respected my 'engaged' officers the most. The men who dealt with their men on a personal level... Who extended the hand of personal friendship and led by virtue of the reciprocal respect generated by the uniquely American concept of team quarter-backing. The 'someone has to call the shots' principle you learn on playing fields in elementary schools... That you learn from Boy Scout patrol leaders and Safety Patrol Captains your own age.

I had two such officers, previously mentioned in this tap-dance in the manure pile... Lieutenants Buckner and Schilling. I consider them to be icons of my youth. I learned very important lessons in leadership from them that I did not understand or even recognize at the time.

An 'engaged' officer is the kind who does not feel that having a cup of coffee in the crew's mess or visiting a sick sailor in an After Battery rack, will forever taint them with a scarlet letter or the unforgivable sin of fraternization with the untouchables. You never forget that kind of leadership.

You remember the nights after a number of days of exchanging dead air for fresh through the gahdam snorkel mast and creating night and day with electrical switches... And tracking daily cycles with 24-hour clocks. You remember that sea stores cigarettes had started thinning out to the point that *Luckies*, *Camels* and *Pall-Malls* were starting to look good. And, some officer would make a trip aft, toss five packs of *Winstons* on a messdeck table, smile and say,

"I hope every one of you dumb bastards get lung cancer."

"Aye sir, we'll do our best."

Or the day you were laying in a rack at Norfolk Naval Hospital and a fellow you shared coffee with many nights on the bridge, turned up to tell you that the COB was getting gahdam sick and tired of not seeing your ugly face at morning quarters. You knew that he didn't have to do that... And that a man in his position must have things a helluva lot more important in his life than visiting some 'flat on his back' E-3 jerk in a place, stinking of ether and alcohol. There were other very fine officers who would not have done that for a variety of very valid reasons, but you don't get a great feeling when you recall their names and faces... You just remember they were damn competent officers, good men who chose to keep their distance and maintain some kind of mystical social separation.

When a submarine takes a fatal plunge to the ocean floor, all aboard gain and maintain a unique eternal equality.

I am not one who cared or resented an arms-length relationship with certain individuals forward. I have always felt that if a man is honest in his belief and conducts himself in accordance with what he feels is correct, then good men are obligated to accord him respect. In my day, that was the universally accepted norm in the Submarine Service.

All of us saw officers' hats on tables in exotic locations, not normally frequented by nuns and radio evangelists. We saw coats with shoulder boards hanging on hooks in establishments, that sold intimate companionship in thirty-minute increments. And, we remember assisting officers returning to the boat slightly under the weather and having difficulty with their mother tongue, down into the forward torpedo room so the below decks watch could assist them to a point of authorized horizontal storage. We all saw it and knew (A) It was nobody's business and (B) It was part of the fraternal obligation of those wearing twin fish, to make damn sure it remained nobody's business.

I recall riding back in a launch and some officer, off another boat anchored out and 'swinging the hook', was talking about some dark-eyed honey turning tricks in some commercial establishment ashore.

"Gentlemen, she was pure heaven. She knew things that you never saw in books. Any of you guys ever hear of the upside down butterfly dance?"

"Hey sir... Was her name Juanita Cha-Kita?"

"Sure was... You have her?"

"Yeah, had her twice... Once last year and again last week. Man, he's not lying... That chic packs a college education into fifteen minutes."

"Hey sailor... You goin' back?"

"Yes sir... Sir?"

"Yes..."

"You think that makes us family?"

In a way, when our DD-214s turned yellow, our Dolphins tarnished, our hair turned gray and we started scheduling yearly prostate exams, we all became family and on a first-name basis. We peed in the same location, ate at the same tables and wore the same kinds of obnoxious Hawaiian shirts. We told lies and put our arms around each others shoulders and laughed... Laughs nobody else would have understood. We introduced the women in our lives and we were family.

And you know what? The gahdam world maintained its scheduled rotation and didn't fall off its axis.

Mobile Canteen Truck by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I think it was officially called the Naval Exchange Mobile Canteen Vehicle, known to the animals that inhabited Pier 22 as the 'Roach Coach', the 'Geedunk Wagon' or the 'Pogey Bait Truck'.

It sold stale candy bars, cokes, bags of peanuts, smokes, pipe tobacco, Red Man chew, pocket combs, pens that ran out of ink on page two of a love letter, hamburgers made from ground up animals nobody had ever seen and hot dogs that gave you stomach acid that could dissolve chipping hammers.

"Hey... Two burgers, a coke, an Orange Nehi, pack'a Luckies and two bags of chips."

"You want everything on them burgers?"

"Yeah, we can pick off anything we don't want... You guys Navy?"

"Yeah..."

"How'n the hell do you get a gahdam billet on a damn ice cream wagon? What do you tell your girlfriend when she asks what you do in the Navy?"

In the summer, it came rolling down the pier right after the sun went down... The topside watch would yell down the conn hatch,

"Hey below... Mobile canteen truck is on the pier."

And all over the Squadron, heads appeared in open hatchways and the faithful gathered on the pier to buy portable cholesterol boosters. Then we'd find a place to plant our butts and eat our gourmet treats.

One night, the guys handed out survey forms. One of the questions read, "Is there anything we don't presently carry in our line of available merchandise that you could use?"

Everyone wrote *rubbers, Slim Jims, beer and skin books*.

Nothing Ever Changed by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

"Hey Rats... Gettin' underway at 0800 in the morning."

"How long we gonna be out for?"

"Only know we're singlin' up at 0800... Outside of that, I've got no idea where'n the hell we're goin' or how long we'll be out... You got some place to be?"

"Not really... Just wonderin' where in the hell we're goin'..."

"That's the hell about being a damn E-3... Never knowin' anything. I'll bet every sonuvabitch in the gahdam Squadron Office knows where we're heading. Dammit to hell... The entire time I've been in the gahdam Navy, I've never known where my butt is gonna be next week, except when this rust-attracting sonuvabitch is up on blocks in drydock."

"Hey Sweetpea... You're not exactly an indispensable element in the Naval planning process."

"The hell I'm not... Me'n Arliegh Burke, that's all you need. The rest of it is just icing on the cake."

"Well Morning Glory, you'd better kick your butt in gear because it's gonna be a long night. Gotta fuel this iron monster... Throw in a top-off charge... Make a radio run and pick up our guard mail up in the Squadron Office and load stores when the truck gets here."

"Anyone seen Stuke?"

"He's up in J-50."

"Well somebody get word to him to bring some books. Damn if I wanna spend five or six weeks with nothing to read but bean can labels and the Bluejackets Manual."

"Jeezus Dex ... Getta gahdam library card."

"Okay, okay... You know why they don't send donkeys to school?"

"No?... Well nobody likes a smartass."

"Hey below."

"Yo."

"Truck on the pier... Need some guys topside to get our supplies off the truck and piled up forward of the sail."

"Why not take it below? Hell, we've got enough guys in the duty section to get it below and stored."

"Naw... The duty officer said not to stow anything until Rat Johnson and the other cooks come aboard."

"Hell, we'll be moving crap off the damn deck when we are passin' Old Point Comfort... Man, the Old Man is gona be hotter than a two-dollar firecracker."

"Hey Dex... Don't worry about it, I'll guarantee that we'll have the deck clear before the Old Man gets her rigged for sea and makes the first trim dive,"

"No shit, Sherlock."

"Hey... Get a bunch of you idiots up topside and start unloading that truck."

"Topside, aye."

Guys who slept on the old smokeboats slept in weird configurations. They assumed attitudes intended to keep them from being launched out of their racks in heavy seas. You had guys who held valve handles... Pipes above their racks... Bunk chains. You had guys who slept in what we called 'figure four fashion'... Guys who covered their heads with their foulweather jackets. Waking these guys up was like resurrecting the dead... Like breathin life into a pile of cigar store Indians.

"Hey Bill... Wake up... Stores loading topside... Up and at 'em... Roll out, babe... Coffee in the messdeck... C'mon, hit the deck, sweetheart."

"Jack... Hey, roll out... That's it... Go toss some water in your face and head topside."

"OK Rhodey... Don't give me that fake snoring you smoke-stacking jaybird... I saw you open your eyes and I haven't got time for your fake bullshit."

"Ladies, it's colder than a witches tit topside, so grab your sea jackets."

"Hey below... We're going North. The XO got approach carts for Halifax from the Cubera."

"Jeezus, are you Dick Tracy?"

It went that way all night long. Great coffee and an incessant flow of idiotic conversation as the lads prepared the boat for sea. It was what sub qualified bluejackets did...

"Anyone seen the 'T' handle wrench for the topside locker lids?"

"Dex... Why don't you stuff one of those bastards under the old mans' rack... You're always lookin' for the damn thing every gahdam time we get underway."

"Hey, the damn thing is only good for one thing... It's not like some sonuvabitch would steal it for his honey's charm bracelet."

"Hey Dex... Stuke just dropped down the A.B. hatch hawkin his standard horse manure about being captured by a band of gypsy nymphomaniacs and being held as a sex slave for the entire weekend."

"Hell, I believe it."

"You would."

"Hey Doc, I think the Stookey man needs a light-duty chit. He's been subjected to seventy-two hours of continuous non-stop sex and needs time to recuperate."

"Was it consensual or non-consensual?"

"Hey Stuke, was it consensual or non-consensual?"

"Dex... Definitely non consensual. They held a gun on me... All thirty-two of them... They forced themselves on me... Took advantage of me... Chief, I hope this won't reflect adversely on my career and stop me from making Admiral."

"Mr. God's gift to women, how bout laying topside and join your illustrious shipmates who are jackassing stores to the after battery hatch."

And so it went.

"Hey Chief... There are two civilians wandering around topside who say that they are going with us... Jeezus Glen, say it isn't so."

"Hey, how in the hell do I know? I would say if two guys showed up topside in the gahdam dark saying they had word to report aboard, I would bet money on it... Nobody is stupid enough to bullshit about going North in the winter time... Not on one of these 'freeze your ass off contraptions'. No Dex, they're for real."

"Well dammit, don't rack em in the After Battery."

"Why not?"

"Jeezus Chief, you put that guy from Daystrom Electronics back here last November and the sonuvabitch told the exec that his crew was weird. All we did was talk about having sex with farm animals and we were hugging each other and calling each other 'Sweet Cakes' and 'Darlin'. The next thing we know, the exec rounds us up and herds us into the messdecks, lights us on fire and makes it clear that it would be in our collective best interest to knock off the bullshit. Then he said, 'Am I fully understood?' Then Johnny Roberts said, 'Aye sir... You don't wan't us havin' sex with farm animals and stuff like that.' and the Exec went nuts. We had our tattle tale, stool pigeon wardroom spy... Put this sonuvabitch in the forward torpedo room... He won't have to walk too far to rat on the poor bastards up there."

"See what I can do."

"Thanks Chief... We'll save you a turkey the next load of oversexed farm animals we get aboard."

"Keep it up Horsefly and you'll always wonder why you and your fellow idiots are constantly up to your butts in boiling oil."

"Hey below, need some line handlers topside... Outboard boats getting underway."

"Laying topside."

"Well get your ass in gear."

"REQUIN arriving."

"Holly jumpin' catfish... The Old Man's aboard."

"Yeah... He'll toss his gear down the bear trap to his steward and then he'll put on that hydraulic oil-stained steaming hat and yell, 'Let's get the boat to sea, gentlemen... Single up all lines... Set the maneuvering watch... Pass the sailing list up to the topside watch on the next boat and get some damn coffee up here'."

And men wiping sleep from their eyes stumbled topside... The sailing list was passed to the next boat inboard... Smoke belched forth aft of the sail and engulfed everything as the black cloud drifted forward.

"Take in the brow."

"Take in two and three."

"Take in number four."

"Full left rudder... All back one third... Take in number one... Shift the colors, mark the log."

And so she slid aft into the Elisabeth River... Three-hundred eleven feet-six inches of sinister looking naval hardware... Eighty-two officers and men... A complete community of undersea warriors.

"Hey Chief."

"Yeah whatcha need?"

"Where you want us to stow the farm animals?"

The Art of 'Jury Rig' at Sea by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

When diesel boats came sliding into the nest after weeks at sea, it was not uncommon to see that missing deck locker lids had been replaced with a canvas square, cut out of the side of a seabag and wired over the hole... You could see a lad with orange nylon shot line replacing a broken boot lace and dungaree shirt buttons attached with dental floss.

You see at sea, it was a little difficult to run out to the store every time you busted something or equipment broke down.

Submariners were selected because they could 'Think on their feet'. They weren't so bound by conventional thinking and traditional prescribed technique that they couldn't come up with unconventional, off-the-wall, perfectly workable solutions that could meet the immediate need. It was known by the navy as 'jury rigging'... It was known by E-3s as 'comin' up with some gahdam make-do hootenanny'.

God invented the number ten bean can for submariners. You could punch two holes in one, attach a piece of wire and you had a:

- (1) Bunk chain butt kit (ash tray),
- (2) A place to toss your watch, wallet, spare change and dogtag chain when you crawled into your rack, and
- (3) A universally adaptable drip-catcher to hang under leaky pipes and condensate pans.

I once lost the heel of my boot the second week out. I tried to glue it back on, but the hole I whittled out in the heel to countersink the bolt head gave me a blister the size of a fried egg. So, being the innovative boatsailor I was, I pried the other heel off so I could

correct the starboard list created by the missing heel. I spent four more of the weirdest weeks in my life walking around in them sonuvabitches.

Try going around with no heels on your shoes. You spend a lot of time with your toes pointing up like Aladdin's shoes and wondering if your boots are going to slip through ladder rungs.

I can remember a radio antenna that we refastened after a storm ripped it loose, with one of those metal strips that winds around the key when you open a canned ham.

All of us have those memories... Things we did to get by... Stuff that allowed us to make it from day to day.

The elevation leg on the motion picture projector stripped its gears. So, we elevated it with two Pyrex cereal bowls. The cook cut breakfast biscuits with a tuna can with both ends cut out. The tuning knob on the RBO broke and somebody substituted a Jim Beam bottle cork.

This was just another example of the memories we all have. We all smile when we remember things like cutting up a hot water bottle for gasket material, or straining oil through some gal's pantyhose, looking for telltale metal shavings that would indicate a Shot-to-Hell bearing.

It was just part of what made up the life we lived... Part of what made us what we were.

Gentle Memories of Smokeboat Sailors

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

We all have them... Warm memories collected during our service in our nation's diesel submarines. They are the kind of memories that get you through the long winter nights, when you sit in your favorite rump-sprung chair, watching the dying embers of the fire you've been daydreaming in front of for the last two hours.

Pictures of rollicking bluejackets singing socially unacceptable songs in returning liberty launches... Crawling up and out of the After Battery hatch, to be greeted by bright sunlight and a view of some weird place where folks talked funny and ate roast goat on a stick... Trying to communicate with cab drivers in made-up-on-the-spot sign language and gestures you picked up in Tarzan movies... And watching your quartermaster break your colors and 'two-block 'em' in a nest of ships flying ensigns from places you read about in *National Geographic*.

The memories of girls in next-to-nothing bikinis coming down your starboard tanktops in speedboats that probably cost more than Arliegh Burke's retirement package... The memories of exotic women with garlic breath, runs in their stockings and seen-better-days high heels who gave you the 'Come here Joe' finger sign and promised you,

"Best bang-bang you ever have, sailorman." and overstated the worth of the product by a mile.

Memories of your wardroom passing over the brow in high collar whites enroute to some function and the Old Man stopping to tell you to make sure none of your animal shipmates returning three sheets to the wind, drowned or use their skulls to knock dents in his tank tops.

Memories of duty nights in foreign ports sitting on a five gallon paint can aft of the sail, listening to music on a transistor radio that sounded like some guy was boiling cats while some gal sang in an unknown tongue through a vacuum cleaner hose.

You had to ride the old 'petroleum ponies of the sea' to collect those memories.

Filipino stewards sitting around trading ukulele strings and strumming homesick tunes... Cooks sitting in the messdeck, sharpening knives and giving you a play-by-play description of some Brooklyn Dodgers game that happened way the hell before you were born... The Chief of the Boat sitting on a padded chart locker by the hydraulic manifold telling you that when he rode submarines in 500 B.C., they had real submariners... Who rode boats with stone pressure hulls and COBs who would beat you to death with a dinosaur shin bone if you got two feet off the ordered depth.

Memories of the Old Man in the conning tower making firing observations through the attack scope in a tee-shirt, khakis, flip-flops and knocking his Pall Mall ashes off in a tuna can.

They come and go... You seem to forget the highline transfers where you ended up with a bunch of sea print films the Navy used to torture General Court-Marshal criminals. You forget the nights standing lookout when it was so cold, the contents of your bladder froze and you peed snow cones for three days. You forgot how many trips you and the other idiot jaybird messcook had to make to the garbage dumpster on the pier the night the new cook introduced the crew to boiled liver and turnips.

Memories of fifty cent haircuts on the USS Orion... The sonuvabitch had never gone to barber school. I think he went to some kind of 'A' school where they sent guys too damn stupid to turn into Bosun' Mates, tender MAAs or porta-potty attendants and taught him how scissors work. Only E-3s and people with absolutely no self-respect ever let a barber on Orion get turned loose on them. The only real honest-to-god barber onboard only cut officer's hair.

Memories of East Main Street, Norfolk where you could get drunk, get laid, get crabs, catch typhoid, wake up tattooed, rolled, blind or turned to a pillar of salt, for less than ten bucks.

Remembrance of a bright sunny Mother's Day when Mrs. Sullivan, the lady who lost five sons when a ship went down in World War II... When this lovely lady came down to Pier

23 to have Mother's Day dinner with the crew of the USS Sullivans, we all knocked off ships' work... Put on our dress canvas and joined damn near the entire enlisted roster of Subron Six lining both sides of the DES-SUB Piers access road. We stood there for the better part of an hour... Boatsailors and tin can sailors... Shoulder-to-shoulder...

"She's coming..." passed from lip to lip like lightning... We saluted and cheered as the DESLANT staff car drove by. That moment was my proudest in uniform and the closest I ever got to the meaning of ultimate sacrifice.

Memories of big stainless steel bowls of fluffy mashed potatoes and mushroom covered steaks the size of your home town, turned out by cooks whose favorite ingredient was sweat drips off the tip of their nose...

"Screw you kid, it's hot in here, you dumb bastard."

While your buddies were up at State U. swapping bubblegum in the back seat of the car mommy and daddy shelled out for as a graduation gift, we were jackassing crates of canned goods across the brow in the rain and getting rich off of E-3, Sea and Foreign Duty Pay and Submarine Pay. Somebody once explained to me that as an E-3, The United States Navy paid me fourteen cents an hour, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week... They even covered weekend grabass time... Talk about great deals.

"Excuse me mister... What's your job on this here ship?"

"Well sir, me and this fine looking gentleman are the GDU firing team."

"What'za GDU?"

"Sir, we'd like to tell you but it's classified."

(That's no bull... On Requin it was classified as a job monkeys could not only be trained to do, but could make CPO doing.)

Memories of starry nights when you stretched out on a blanket topside and dropped off to sleep dreaming of what it would be like to take a shower with Debbie Reynolds and woke up with linelocker hinge impressions in your shoulder blades.

Memories of hitchhiking back to the ship wearing a peacoat reeking of cheap perfume and cigar smoke.

Memories of being jammed up in a corner of the topside watch shack trying like hell to roll a 'roll your own' on a windy night.

Thumbing through the official topside watch log book... Reading line after line of "Moored as before, all lines secure" and coming across an entry reading, "Does anybody actually read this stupid boring crap?"

Having a smoke topside standing in a brand new set of Seafarers doeskin tailored blues and having a seagull shit all over the jumper flap piping.

Punching holes in cans of warm beer with a Phillips head screwdriver and the heel of your boot... Then sticking the can in your sock so you could drink in the back of a truck passing through the N.O.B. Gate. The United States Marine Corps never seemed to find six raghats drinking out of a black sock, strange... So much for guarding the streets in Heaven.

Memories of old World War II boatsailors drinking coffee with you in the messdeck and telling you about the days when boatsailors played the game for keeps.

"Yeah kid... They dumped shit on us for six hours... There wasn't an operational incandescent light with a filament left... Gahdam cork dust was all over everything... Found a chunk of deck the size of a Greyhound bus, missing aft of the cigarette deck... You sink a damn Jap light cruiser and you really piss 'em off."

Memories of Chaplains giving Christmas sermons about 'Peace on earth' standing directly below the business end of a pair of five-inch guns.

I know I'm not alone. Memories of duty aboard those grand ladies aren't the exclusive franchise of a few... God in his infinite wisdom bestowed the gift of diesel boat memories on us all. All of us who woke up one day sleeping below ventilation lines and a vent gear operating handle, with a laundry bag full of overly mature skivvies, on a flashpad that smelled like a gorilla owned it.

Yes, if you did it, you know what I mean... And if you didn't you probably could care less.

“Lady Visitors Aboard... Say again, Lady Visitors Aboard” by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Anyone out there who doesn't remember that one over the 1MC?

For those of you who never parked your entire inventory of worldly possessions in a sidelocker of a fuel eating, three hundred-eleven foot submarine, there was no place to hide. There was no place where you could have privacy. Nothing amplified that like the announcement that female visitors would be wandering around below decks.

Don't get me wrong... Nobody on the planet loved women like boatsailors but not when they are cha-cha'ing around butt naked trying to get ready to go ashore.

Picture this. All day long the ship had gone through an 'open house'. Translated into plain english, that means that from 1000 to 1630 an endless parade of the raw

unvarnished population of the world had been streaming through the boat... Fiddling with everything, monkeying with valves, picking up souvenirs (meaning anything not nailed down or welded to the hull), opening head doors and giggling, peeping into the Old Man's stateroom and asking some of the damndest questions ever cooked up in the cranial wilderness of a blithering idiot.

A submarine is essentially a community in a tube... A lot like ant colonies kids have where you can watch the ants do what ever ants do as they go about their daily lives and the little devils can't do a damn thing about it. The After Battery on a smokeboat was a seagoing petting zoo.

Here's a typical example of life on board during a 'come one, come all' open house. Once in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, they announced on the radio that a United States submarine would be open to the touring public. By ten A.M. every loose screw jaybird and his or her ten closest relatives were lined up down the pier.

We had spent half the night 'changing the paper in our birdcage'. The Chief of the Boat decided that after a four hour maneuvering watch, we should spend damn near all night Brassing copper urinal piping, compressing dirty laundry bags into sidelockers and removing any photographic art displaying exposed titties or bare fannies. During this time the cooks were preparing mystery meat and rubberized cheese sandwiches on white 'Kleenex' bread. Two sandwiches and a can of lukewarm soda would have to hold us until 1630 when the topside watch would secure the people pump.

Being innovative, highly adaptable bluejackets, six of us grabbed a box of the wax paper wrapped, 'sorry excuse for chow' sandwiches and shoved cans of pop in our foulweather jackets... Zipped them up and jackassed our load up to the Forward Torpedo Room, lifted the deck plates and dropped down for a luau in the lower flats.

While we were doing our damndest to get wrapped around our sandwiches, a little kid looked down through one of the handholes and yelled,

“Hey mommy, there's a bunch of men down here having a picnic.”

At 1630, they brought the below decks invasion to a screeching halt. Shortly before the Old Man secured visiting hours, the Duty Officer noticed that two nuns had been waiting to tour the boat and were ten or eleven places behind the cut-off point. Not wanting the crew's collective souls to be condemned to eternal hellfire and damnation that night at the local convent, the Duty Officer sent one of the lads over on the pier to tell the two sisters to stick around until the mob dispersed and that they could have a personalized private walk through.

In the meantime the animals in the After Battery had begun their pre-liberty antics and ritual. The showers were opened... Towels, Ivory Soap, fifty brands of hair tonic, armpit odor masking agent, and cheap after shave emerged from bunk bags and sidelockers.

Nobody heard the word passed that 'lady visitors were aboard'. The first we knew about their stroll through the ship, came when some buck-naked idiot yelled,

“Jeezus H. Christ... Where’n hell did those two nuns come from?”

Adrian Stuke and I had just cleared the After Battery showers when we looked up and saw the two nuns.

“Hey Dex... Look... Two nuns.”

He crawled back in the shower while I did my damndest to create a terry cloth hula skirt out of a rather skimpy towel.

The major attraction on duty night was the 'on board' nightly film. After chow, when the messcooks had washed the dishes and scoured the pots and pans... And the duty cook had tidied up the galley... The duty M.P. O. (Motion Picture Operator) appeared with his ANQB 16mm projector and the movie for the evening.

A diesel boat messdeck wasn't the best theater you could find. The fore and aft main passageway ran directly in front of the screen. Anyone heading through the messdeck in either direction had to pass between the theatergoers and the screen. The screen pulled down over the bread locker door and was the size of one unfolded page of your hometown newspaper. An individual walking upright in front of the screen could block out damn near the entire screen.

Submarine etiquette required that a member of ship's company duck down and do a kind of duck waddle below the screen. If you failed to do this, your shipmates would yell personalized instructions like,

”Get out of the way, you stupid sonuvabitch!”

“Hey you dumb bastard, you make a better door than a window!”

And they would throw stuff at you like stale rolls, banana peels and sour dish rags.

In an all-male society, the restrictive tenants of gentility and polite civility erode quickly. Language coarsens... If not monitored and corrected by the ship's leadership, personal hygiene suffers gradual deterioration and the life aft of the wardroom takes on the air of a jungle jamboree.

Nothing can trigger an outburst of sexual frustration like the appearance of a well-constructed female in abbreviated costume cavorting across the movie screen in a bloody smokeboat. The crew erupts like a pack of seven-year olds at a Saturday matinee.

“Hey sweetheart, you wanna have my baby?”

“Get a load of those gazongas!”

“Marry me and take me away from all this.”

Some of my best memories are connected with wisecracking during films... Natalie Wood in *Splendor in the Grass* damn near triggered a mutiny. Most of us were laughing so hard we nearly got sick.

The problem with this sort of animalistic clowning around was that it became a thoughtless reaction. This in turn lead to some very funny and embarrassing incidents when visiting 'lady visitors' came aboard and attended the duty movie.

Almost invariably, some idiot would come through the After Battery air lock door, duck down, look up at the screen as he went by and give some pretty young thing on the screen a little titty tickle, pat on the fanny or make some remark that would make a sewer digger blush.

All of us got caught on the 'lady visitor' flypaper at least once during our term of service.

Late in life, I was to learn that a highly respected officer aboard the Requin participated in the conception of his first child with his lovely bride on the sail chart table, thirty minutes after the word 'Lady visitors aboard' was announced by the below decks watch. Her panties later turned up in a coffee cup the skipper found during a harbor entry approach, two weeks later.

Damn, it was great to be a submarine sailor.

Stores Loading by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Ever see 'mine ponies'? They used to pull coal carts around in the lower levels of mines by using little ponies. The United States Navy used E-3s, the navy equivalent of the burro. We were the animals who jackassed movable cargo from holds on the tender... Out of trucks... From stacks of crap on the pier, put there by the Tooth Fairy or Easter Bunny.

Stores loading was, what the navy called an 'all hands evolution'. To me, a certified dumbass at the anchor end of the social submersible pyramid, 'all hands' meant everybody in the crew. The only exceptions being people without hands and Naval Academy graduates.

But in practice, it only included the lower order of beasts, known simply as 'After Battery Rats', the coolies of the force.

“Okay gentlemen, listen up! We’ve got a truckload of some kind of really heavy stuff arriving here at 0800 and I’m gonna need some non-rated, simple-minded idiots to postpone their liberty and stay aboard until we get all that heavy as hell crap aboard and properly stowed for sea... Any questions sweethearts?”

“Yeah Chief... This an 'all hands evolution'?”

“You’ve got it, Horsefly.”

“Well, how come these 'all hands evolutions' only involve the wrong side of the tracks, hotsacking lower elements of this seagoing sonuvabitch?”

“That’s the way it is... That’s the way it’s always been.”

“Does Arliegh Burke know about this grave injustice?”

“Write and ask him on your own time, Sweet Pea.”

“Chief, you an 'all hand'?”

“Naw... I’m a supervisory God’s gift to leadership, stupid idiot assembler and driver.”

“You’re mother must be proud.”

“Didn’t have a mother... I just fell out of a seabag at the 'Lakes.’”

“Fell out of the south end of a north-bound gorilla, is more like it.”

“Knock it off and get out on the pier.”

And we went out on the pier. We went out in the dead of night... In the rain... We unloaded trucks, jackassed crap from holds in weird locations on the USS Orion, and we moved stuff from piles on the pier.

The submarine force acquired stuff on the basis of weight. If something weighed more than a ton, they bought it and put it in cardboard boxes, dumped it on pier 22 and checked to see if it warped the E-3 spine when loaded in Egyptian pyramid builders fashion... Onto ancient petroleum-powered submarines... Preferably in the dark... Freezing weather... In the rain. That’s how chow and other gear got loaded on submarines in 1959 to 1965.

I know this to be a fact... I was master jackass.

Looking back, much of the process of becoming a submariner involved ‘gang work’... ‘All hands’ working parties. There was nothing that brought us together like cussing in the rain... Tossing cases to each other under the dim lights of pier 22.

There were many things that made us a crew... Crew is naval lingo for 'family'. But, the main thing was soaking dungaree shirts with sweat, cussing authority, each other, and the weather.

There are a few things an E-3 boatsailor can be thankful for... Not being in Noah's deckforce when the sonuvabitch loaded the Ark was one of them.

Boat Deck Movies on Orion by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Orion... Known to the animals of Squadron Six as 'Mother Onion', provided what in a municipal jurisdiction would be known as 'Community Services'. It was our medical clinic... Hospital... Shopping center... Entertainment venue... Our payroll office and the home of our corporate management, or voodoo master magicians who moved submarines around the North Atlantic like bathtub toys.

We also used to go over to Orion after dark to watch movies up on the boat deck when we had good weather.

At about 1930, a couple of idiots rigged a screen and stacked a load of gray folding chairs. Then they rigged up a projector and at around 2000, a mob of 'stay aboard' bluejackets collected and the movie opened with the obligatory official Navy bullshit short subjects... *'Sailors in Spain'*... *'Men of the USS What's-Its-Name visit an orphanage'*... Stuff you have to watch before the movie. The Navy propaganda they force-fed to the fleet.

What you had was an all-male audience given to socially unacceptable comment, wiseass remarks and verbalized stupidity.

"Hey! He didn't stick him with that sword... The sonuvabitch went under his arm... Hell, I saw it."

"You dumb bastard, they're actors. You think they actually kill each other, you Arkansas hayseed?"

"Who you callin' hayseed, you Yankee dumbass?"

There was always some kid filled with facts on cowboy actors... Cowboy horses... Sidekicks... Every sonuvabitch who ever sung with the 'Sons of the Pioneers' and Roy Rogers' dog.

When any good-looking woman waltzed on the screen, it triggered a complete breakdown in social decorum. In less than a half-second, elevated thoughts deteriorated and descended to a sub cave dweller level.

“Hey Stuke get a load of that gals’ ho-hos... Man, that child must have been born on a dairy farm.”

“Naw... Corn-fed farm... Midwest... Big tit country.”

It didn’t get any better than that. Sitting out under the stars with your shipmates with a couple of ham sandwiches the cook threw together for you, in your foul weather jacket pockets, watching some film and passing wise ass comments back and forth.

Lads who bypassed their military obligation in favor of State U or playing house with their high school squeeze, missed that. We didn’t know it at the time, at nineteen there’s no way to recognize it, but it was one of those memories that when connected with thousands of others, made up the collective memories that made you different from lads who never stood in a service pay line or ended up with a DD-214.

“Hey Darlin’ find a gahdam seat and plant your ass. We can’t se through you, you big ape.”

“Down in front”

“Did anyone tell you submariners that you’re guests, you loudmouth bastards?”

“Guests? Sweetheart if it wasn’t for us, this floating machine shop and grocery wagon would be out of work.”

“Hey, if you guys want to exchange love notes, take it below...”

We were all Subron Six. In the final analysis, we were all family. Sitting there on a summer night with a light breeze coming in from off Craney Island, pinning lighthearted hell on each other in a never-ending verbal custard pie fight, we became what was simply known as “The Squadron.”

I don’t know what officers did to become part of the Squadron... I never saw them stand on the edge of the fleet landing, peeing off the pier and singing the 'Barnacle Bill' song. We never had to pick them up from the sidewalk in front of Bells... They never hung around the pier dumpsters, bumming smokes and solving the world’s problems or turned up in a fuel hose free for all.

Boatdeck movies were a big part of it. 'IT' being what was a gradual ritual of Squadron adoption.

“Hey you! Yeah, you off the gahdam Carp... Haven't they heard of frigging deodorant where you come from, you hillbilly hay shaker?”

“Why sweetcakes... You wanna take me to bed, you cute, unshaven gorilla?”

“Knock it off... I can’t hear the movie!”

“Don’t tell me you are actually watching that pathetic excuse for entertainment.”

“What’s wrong... You don’t believe in talking mules?”

“You’re damn right there are talking mules... You ever see a Panamanian barmaid?”

Most nights, the audience was far more entertaining than the featured film.

“How many of you bastards have seen *'The Cattle Queen of Montana'* over thirty times?”

“Me!”

“You don’t count if you made a Northern run on the Sirago last fall.”

“No, but I’ll bet every sonuvabitch on Requin holds the world record for watching *'Around the World in Eighty Days'*.”

If none of this makes any sense to you, then you never parked your worthless, good-for-nothing ass on a steel folding chair, on the boat deck of the USS Orion and counted blobs of dried seagull crap while waiting for the opening scene of *'Tammy and the Bachelor'*.

There were nights when they announced over the 1 MC, “Navy mobile canteen truck, on the pier...” and the entire audience evaporated.

Dex, Do You Remember The Sirago?

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Do you remember the Sirago?

You bet your thirteen-button blues I remember her.

I remember crossing her brow on the way over to the Requin... Some nights, hauling such a package that I had difficulty operating my locomotion gear below my thirteen-button flap. Most of us were subject to alcohol-induced leg mutiny the first night in. The topside watches would pass you from boat to boat until *your* topside watch recognized you and passed you down the after battery hatch to the below decks watch.

"Hey below! Got a returning, bent all to hell, drunk."

"Pass him down... I've got him."

"Well, put him on your call sheet for a 0300 piss call... He's hauling a load."

"Got ya... 0300, aye."

I know that I've held many detailed conversations with the Sirago topside watch in fluent Drunkanese, a language essentially the same as the unknown tongue.

We may not have served on the same boat, but if you have awakened aboard ship to find a pair of the same barmaid's earrings in your jumper pocket... You're family.

If you've shared the same section of a Hampton Boulevard curb while redepositing the better part of a fully loaded Little Italy pizza in the right turn lane, by the NOB (Naval Operating Base) gate... You're family.

If you've ever shared adjoining head stalls in Bell's, standing on the head seat so the Shore Patrol can't see your feet to make them think you didn't run in there to hide during a post 'free for all jail break'... You're family.

If your dog tags ever left the impression of your name, rate and serial number on the same set of bare tits... You're family.

If you've ever crawled topside in freezing dead-ass winter to catch heavies and haul a guy's boat's mooring lines aboard, haul them in and secure them to your cleats and double them up later... You're more than family, you're blood brothers.

If a topside watch at half past 0300, splits his last two Marlboros with you... You should marry his ugliest sister.

If you are both up in the Squadron Office, stealing office supplies for your yeoman and you trade a stapler for a three-hole punch... Such a transaction automatically makes you family.

If at any point in your Subron Six tour you were on a first name basis with a guy catching a smoke behind the Edible Garbage dumpster just forward of the Kittiwake... You're brothers.

If you ever peed on each other's screw guards and rubbed ballast tanks... You're brothers.

If you share a cab and split the fare... You're family.

If you meet each other up in the Orion radio shack, trying on starched white hats so you can steal one that fits... Such a rendezvous means you can turn up at each others house for Thanksgiving dinner or be best men at each other's weddings.

If your immunization card is signed by the same pimply-faced Orion corpsman... You're family.

If your COBs get loaded together at the Chiefs Club... You're family.

If your respective boats ever screwed each other in the same movie trade... It's like being adopted.

If you stood topside and laughed your ass off when men from both boats got tossed out in the slip and hauled back aboard to have their Dolphins pinned on a sopping wet shirt... You're family.

If you were ever involved in an Orion paint locker raid and you ran into other guys rooting around in there that you knew were other boatsailors and you asked,

"Where in the hell did you guys get keys to this place?"

And the answer came back...

"None of your damn business... You writin' a book?"

They were either Sirago or Cubera guys.

We were young... So damn broke, it took four of us to fund a five-mile cab ride.

When we boarded the Grandby Street bus after standing in the rain, wearing a peacoat that could absorb fifty gallons of water and never drip, and got so heavy it broke both your ankles, we smelled like soggy sheep who'd been swimming in diesel fuel.

"You a boatsailor?"

"Yeah... Sirago."

"Requin."

"Let's give the old lady with the shoppin' bag our seat."

"You betcha."

"Hey driver... D&S Piers."

And you would run into each other again in a late Sunday night fuel hose free for all, or jump into their stores loading party to give them a hand. You remember, one of those human jackass lines... Those E-3 conveyor belt lines where the Navy moved stack of boxes, crates and bags, like ants.

You would be three sheets to the wind standing on a pier, waiting for the liberty launch after it made a run and you saw a cab dump some poor sonuvabitch wearing Dolphins and a straw hat, who had no idea what planet he was on or how he got grass stains all over his new whites.

"Hey Stuke... I know that bastard, he's off the Sirago... Let's get him back."

Thirty minutes later, after he had tossed his cookies in the launch bilges and showed you all the photos of his girl he carried in his wallet, you passed his pre-hangover, inert form to his topside watch and watched the numbers on his sail fade into the darkness, aft of the launch wake.

We shared each others night baker's sticky buns... Assisted each other's injured to the Orion's lower brow... We ogled each others wives, girl friends and in some rare cases, daughters. We bought each other beer and we shook each other's hands when we said our goodbyes to the squadron and tossed our gear on the pier.

Yes I remember the Sirago.

Her hull numbers were an address on the street where I lived and her crew was... And always will be... Family.

Five Bucks and full Peacoat Pockets by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There's a lot of stuff they leave out of submarine movies, TV documentaries and Tom Clancy books. They conveniently omit any mention of anchor end riff-raff and the survival techniques employed by the bottom-feeding element of the diesel powered submarine social order.

On Fridays, the boats in Squadron Six put down weekend liberty. All the skippers knew that bluejackets move at the max rate of 50 miles per hour by plane, train, bus, personal vehicle, piggyback or hitch hiking. (Some wide-awake idiot wrote, "But Dex, hitch hiking was against regulations." So was sticking your hands in your peacoat pockets... Playing cards for money and peeing off the pier. But there were very few bluejackets in Portsmouth Naval Prison for the above listed infractions.)

"What are you in for?"

"Me?"

"Yeah, you."

"Pissing off the pier behind the geedunk truck."

"How bout you?"

"Got ten for hitchhiking and an additional five for hands-in-peacoat-pockets."

"What about the guy they've got chained to the bulkhead topside?"

"They're gonna shoot the bastard for participating in an after torpedo room poker game during a battery charge."

A good skipper would make the call to put down weekend liberty early and announce over the 1MC,

"Liberty will commence at 1000 hours for all hands except those in section three who have scheduled weekend duty .Let me remind you that other units operating from this location will be getting their weekend liberty much later. Hooting, hollering, emulating the start of the Oklahoma Land Rush will call attention to Requin's early liberty policy and could result in termination of the practice."

We assembled in the forward torpedo room and were released in ones and twos at three-minute intervals, just like the guys in the GREAT ESCAPE movie. Each man was told to make the facial expression of men on their way to get a root canal.

We had something known as the 'allowable radius', the maximum distance an American bluejacket was allowed to go in 72 hours, in case a sneak attack from Peru or Monaco required our presence. It was a totally bullshit policy invented by some idiot who obviously failed to understand sexual attraction and its effect on the ingenious nineteen-year old American seagoing warriors.

"Dex darling, what is an 'allowable radius'?"

"Sweetheart, you know your dumb dog, Ralphie?"

"Yes."

"You know how he's constantly humping people's legs and sniffing under old ladies dresses?"

"Yes."

"And you know how your dad takes him our in the back yard to avoid embarrassment and snaps a chain on his collar that is connected to a steel stake? Well, when Ralph runs out of chain in any direction, he's at his 'allowable radius'."

"You don't have a chain."

"It's an imaginary chain the Navy creates."

"That sounds dumb."

It is pure unadulterated horseshit... SubRon Six operates on the theory that if your destination is somewhere on a National Geographic globe, it's okay to take a 'there-and-back-shot' on a 72.

We also operated on the honor-bound traditional premise that if you found an incapacitated, mentally deranged or dead American bluejacket outside of his allowable radius, you were obligated to drag, haul or piggy back the worthless bastard to a point within his allowable radius, before dumping him.

We, the great unwashed, hitchhiked. We were poor... We lived both below the poverty line and the waterline. We packed more dead-broke sailors in the After Battery than the Calcutta building code allowed Indian landlords to pack Hindus in a refrigerator crate.

None of us ever had enough money. The United States paid an entry-level submarine sailor about what McDonald's was paying Gus the busboy. Serving at the entrance level of submarine sailing, could best be characterized as a form of patriotic poverty.

When a member of Requin's ships company was going to 'stretch a 72', it became an 'all-hands evolution'. First, we all chipped in. We all tossed in the hat to make sure whoever it was making the long-range run had the maximum level of fallback resources he might need. The cooks would always make sandwiches and wrap them in wax paper. You could pack these rations in your peacoat pocket in the winter and tucked in the top of your AWOL bag in the summer.

Paying for food could put one helluva dent in traveling funds. E-3s used to use the term 'cheap eats' for stuff like grilled cheese sandwiches, dime store lunch counter chili, chicken salad and potato chips. Hell, at nineteen you can survive on mosquitoes and Cheetos for five to ten days.

America, God bless her, is a land where many male citizens have served honorably in her armed forces and never fail to recognize a lad on a long-range mission to pick up a little kissy face time with his girl back home. It was not unusual to call the waitress over and ask for your check, only to find that some gentleman or lady had paid it with her own when leaving.

This was not charity or some kind of sympathetic handout, it was the purest form of evidence of generational linkage between men and women who who had paid dues similar to yours, who recognized and deeply appreciated the personal sacrifice required in honorable service. I have discharged my obligation to reciprocate many times since I cleared my last Receiving Station.

Thursday evening, you rooted through your side locker... Found three sets of clean skivvies... Four pairs of socks, your shaving kit (known navy-wide as your 'douche

bag')... The trashy paperback book you were reading. One guy taped a note on the cover of some real piece of literary garbage he was reading that said,

"If I get killed somewhere to and from Pittsburgh and you are going through my gear, throw out this book before you send the rest of this stuff home to Mom."

One thing the sub force taught you was to be prepared for every contingency.

Hauling on a stretched 72 was a lot like equipping Charles Lindberg to fly the Atlantic... The entire After Battery had a hand in assuring the success of the mission.

I always tucked a deck of cards in my AWOL bag... When you're on the road hitchhiking, you can find folks to get up a gin game with while waiting to catch a ride. I can remember playing cards once under a street lamp at midnight on the back of some guy's guitar case.

The best way to see this wonderful country, meet her fine people and see the wonders of everyday life, is at ground level. Meeting folks along the way... Taking time to shake a few old veterans hands and eat that second piece of pie and wash it down with the third 'free' coffee with the waitress whose brother was riding a can in the Pacific, was ALWAYS worth the time.

All low-end smokeboat sailors remember setting off on long-range adventure with your peacoat pockets loaded with ham sandwiches, somewhere between five and twenty bucks in your jumper pockets and a cardboard sign reading 'Madison, Wisc', 'Nashville, Tenn', 'Birmingham, Ala', or simply 'New York' on one side, and 'DesSub Piers, Norfolk, VA' on the other.

Nowadays, you never see an American bluejacket standing by the side of the road with his thumb making the 'going my way' internationally recognized sign... Hell, it was a great recruiting gimmick that cost the American taxpayer nothing. It put highly motivated boatsailors in cars with totally captive audiences. Boy, when the silly sensitive naval leadership put their sea boot down on catching rides, they tossed another wonderful bluejacket tradition past the shitcan rim.

And there were days when you were sitting on your AWOL bag by the side of the road with a set of Dolphins gleaming in the sun and you would here some bluejacket yell,

"Hey sailor, what boat you off of?"

"Requin outta Norfolk."

"Trigger outta Charleston... Jump in."

And you shared expenses and ham sandwiches... Cussed northern runs, powdered milk and the dumb sonuvabitch who thought submariners wouldn't tap-dance past an allowable radius like George S. Patton went through Belgium.

And as the car whizzed over the asphalt you both knew how great it was to be boatsailors and own the world.

The Women Who Loved Us by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There's a lot of stuff written about submarines... The men, the ships, the schools, the equipment, units, piers, locations, bars, hookers, and God knows what else. But, we don't say a helluva lot about those wonderful women who loved us. Believe me, loving a damn diesel boat sailor took one CrackerJack woman... They were, and will always remain among God's most endearingly wonderful creations.

As a linehandler, I was always topside when we came into Pier 22. It could be 0200 in a damn hailstorm and they would be there... Snow... Rain... Hell, rattlesnakes could have been falling from the sky and they would have been there waiting for what? An unshaven, stinking, raggedy-ass idiot, hauling a sack of laundry, reeking of the inside of a seagoing submersible zoo.

They actually couldn't wait to get their arms around the smelly idiots that belched forth from the iron monster just tethered to the pier or bouncing tank tops with some other iron monster moored in the nest.

Hey, you lucky bastards sit back and close your eyes... Think back. Remember the days when the lady out there doing the dinner dishes before she goes upstairs to iron the shirt you'll wear to work tomorrow, was 24? Remember that? Back when you two lived on E-4 pay with sub, sea and foreign duty pay?

In those days, she met you with two-year-old Patrick on her hip, wearing a J.C. Penny sale sundress and a smile that needed yard markers.

Later, when you were sucking snorkel air for a living, she attended parent teacher conferences, school plays, PTA spaghetti dinners, little league games, scout awards banquets and dental appointments without your help. She sat in the emergency room at the Norfolk Naval Hospital and in the principal's office, times when it would have been really great to have you around.

They were saints. Saints who didn't exactly get prize packages. I mean, think back... Marrying a guy who spent most of his time plowing invisible holes in the ocean, wasn't such a great deal. Living on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches until payday... Knitted Christmas gifts... Dropping a busted TV off at the Salvation Army simply because repairs couldn't be fitted in the family budget. Hand me down kid's clothes... Home permanents in lieu of trips to the beauty shop.

Horsefly, do you have any idea what a lucky bastard you are? Do you have any idea how rare it is for a woman to put up with crap like that?

Yes, we were loved by some very special ladies. The 'Welcome home, sailor' with arms around your neck kind. Hell, the way you smelled and looked, you couldn't have paid somebody who didn't love you, to do that.

Remember duty nights when they passed the word, "Lady visitors aboard" and the Duty Officer sent the Below Decks Watch on a Paul Revere run through the boat whispering,

"Murphy's bride is in the Crew's Mess watching the movie. Watch your gahdam language and if you pass through the compartment don't pat the actresses on the screen, on the ass."

Remember laying in your rack in the Alley and getting a whiff of some 'catch me, rape me' perfume, when some tender young thing dropped down into the boat? One whiff of that perfume and you were rooting through your sidelocker for a set of whites and heading up to Bells.

They actually ordered see through ooh-la-la baby doll nighties they wouldn't have been caught dead in under any other circumstances, to welcome you home.

Submarine sailors are not known for their sensitivity when it comes to selecting cohabitational locations. Pier head parking lot... Kroger's food store parking lot... Driveway at vacationing pal's house... Front seat or back seat, didn't matter. One returning sailor used to toss two dollars worth of nickels in the backyard to keep his kids occupied. Another first class once took his teenage daughter to the movies to see *'Gone with the Wind'* and then after a raging ten minutes of cohabitational bliss, he and his dear sweet bride fell asleep... And little Trixie watched the whole damn thing twice, because the folks running the theater who knew the family, didn't want her standing out in the rain.

I once saw this TV program about nuke sailors whose wives put perfumed panties in sealed plastic baggies for sailors to tuck under their pillows to remember them by.

You have any idea what that would have caused on a smokeboat? Nocturnal fantasy dreams would have had the place hopping around like fresh-caught fish in the bottom of an aluminum canoe.

They were ours. They will always be ours. Every damn submarine base should have a memorial tribute to the smokeboat sailors' bride... Say, a stature of a beautiful girl in a Robert Hall bargain basement fashion, holding the hand of a grinning bluejacket in acid-eaten dungarees and a frayed white hat.

Ladies, this is for you. God bless you and all you represent. You and you alone made a contribution to this nation's winning of the Cold War only you could have given. It was

recognized by every boatsailor who ever stood topside when his boat put her lines over and saw the kind of smile true love puts on a patriotically-inspired, loyal woman's face.

Those of us, not married at the time, learned lessons in what truly counts in a marriage from watching these amazingly wonderful ladies.

Well here's to you ladies. There was no more important part of submarining than being your friend... And being asked home for a home-cooked meal.

Your life was not easy, in fact it was one helluva lot tougher than any starry-eyed bride should have been asked to deal with. But, the reward for your personal hardships and sacrifices will be found in the memories all loyal and faithful women accumulate and in the deep respect by which you are held by the men who stood topside and regarded your \$8.95 sale dress as a gown worn by an angel.

Dolphin Recognition by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Thanks to the remarkable record turned in by U.S. Submarine crews in World War II, by the time I came along, our pocket insignia of two dolphins and a smokeboat were widely recognized. We were the recipients of the awesome reputation those brave men left us. How many of you remember having someone tap you lightly on the arm followed by,

"Pardon me sir, are you a submariner?"

"Yes Ma'am..."

"My Uncle Joe was a submariner."

Within five minutes you learned that Uncle Joe was a really good guy... That he earned his first bike mowing lawns in some one horse town in Ohio, that no one at National Geographic ever heard of. He volunteered two days after the damn Nips hit Pearl. He rode some submarine that that didn't have a name that could be remembered. Uncle Joe sent her a silk kimono from Japan after the war. He returned a hometown hero, his yellowed photo is still on the wall of his Methodist Sunday School room and folks still set him up for free beers at the VFW. Somehow, it was very important for you to know that this lady was damn proud to be related to a submariner.

To hell with modesty. Boatsailors were special. Didn't matter what navy... If you climbed into contraptions that operated below the surface, you were special. You were accorded a respect for the risk inherent in operating in the hostile environment you volunteered to enter and for the recognized difficulty of your selection and training process.

Once qualified, your 'Dolphins' were your ignition key to magic carpet rides. Being picked up while hitchhiking... Interesting conversations with folks you just met thirty seconds ago... The adoration of young lads and free drinks in train station bars.

Every now and then, you ran into some old bastard who danced the fandango with the 'Goddess of the Main Induction' way the hell before you.

"Son, how long have you been riding the boats?"

"Three years, sir."

"You one of those amazing nuclear power sailors?"

"Not on your ass, sir. I'm riding a fleet snorkel oil-eater outta Norfolk."

"I rode the USS Whatchamacallit outta Freemantle."

"Australia?"

"Yeah... Are there more than one these days?"

"I'm an E-3... Beats me."

"What'z your rating?"

"TM striker."

"You must enjoy being a loafing sonuvabitch."

"What were you?"

"Radioman... RM2."

"Look who's talking... Radioman calling a torpedoman, a loafer. That's like the bullfrog calling the catfish, big mouth."

It was the same level of gentle recognition, Masons, Elks, Moose, Eagles, Shriners, Georgia Tech fraternity brothers and girls in the San Diego Whores Union give each other after secret handshakes, signs and recognition signals. How many guys sat down next to you and said something like,

"I woudda been a submariner like you, if I had..."

Yeah, sure. If a frog had wings, he wouldn't bump his ass. The sonuvabitch could have saved you both a lot of time by simply having 'loser' tattooed on both eyelids.

Every hooker from Hoboken to Hong Kong could look at your rate and Dolphins and calculate your pay scale to within twenty cents before applying the hashmark incremental jack-up.

Dolphins loosened a lot of panty elastic in a lot of strange liberty ports.

There never were a lot of us. The size of the community of qualified submariners has always been defined by the number of operating boats and the shore duty billets related to their support needs and operational requirements.

The submarine force is a small community... A truly elite force. You see a lot of marketing directed at say, paratroopers. There are tens of thousands of them. You can qualify for the insignia in three weeks. They turn'em out conveyor belt style in a twenty-one day sheep dip at Fort Benning, Georgia... You can get all kinds of other wings, elite force badges and shiny geedunk in three to six months. None of them are more difficult to earn or worn by fewer men, than the twin Dolphins of the qualified American submariner. That is a fact each of us can be proud of.

We are respected members of the worldwide fraternity of undersea combatants. That has more to do with the hard earned reputation of our World War II submariners than our later precedent setting level of technological achievement. In the final analysis it comes down to 'the men'... Always the men. The strength of the United States Submarine Force has always been found in the quality and commitment of her men... May it always be so.

The United States goes to extreme lengths in her prospective submariner candidate selection process, quality of training and the knowledge validation, of her undersea warriors. It took time years ago to mature a true submariner and it takes time today. That, to the everlasting credit of all involved, has remained, unchanged... The 'powers that be', have made a lot of changes, but have had the wisdom to see that the qualification process has not been 'watered down'. Nobody with more than two fully functional brain cells, ever felt the twin fish we wore, came out of the end of a Cracker Jack box marked 'PRIZE'.

Being a part of a small elite force brings with it intimate associations unknown in other service branches. Men who serve together in sinkable iron monsters become bonded for life... And grow old together.

You name a boat and chances are several boat sailors in any SubVets gathering will know one or more of the lads who served on her. It is not unusual to hear a bunch of old qualified coots standing around well lubricated with hop-based consumables and one fellow saying,

"You knew 'Iron Gut' Wilson?"

"Yeah we rode the old Ratfish together around '53."

"Hell, I rode with the crazy sonuvabitch on USS Sea Ferret in '58."

"Wuz the bastard still running with that buck-toothed, one-eyed barmaid with the chewed up ear?"

"Yeah."

Then the inevitable boatsailor phrase...

"Small gahdam world, ain't it?"

Right now you're sitting there in your rump sprung Lazy-Boy chair with your hand wrapped around a damn near empty Saint Pauli Girl, reading this. You're smiling... Why? Cause you rode with 'Iron Gut' Wilson in the early sixties and you knew the barmaid and dated her ugly as hell sister... She had a tattoo on her left breast that read 'SubRon Six Girl'. Yeah, who could forget her... And 'Iron Gut', now there was a bluejacket... Threw a damn frog constable off a pier in La Rochelle in '62.

"Small gahdam world ain't it?"

Yes, the Dolphin wearing bluejacket community is a tight family of military service dues payers. Men who shared many pitchers of suds together, in the gentle glow of Budweiser sign neon and hauled each other to the piers where they looked for familiar hull numbers and dropped their drunken carcasses down the hatches of their cast iron homes.

We are men connected to each other by silver pins and the pride we had and still have in the way we discharged our obligation to country and flag.

And in boxes below the grassy sod of cemeteries in this great land where the mortal remains of long ago undersea bluejackets repose in eternal sleep, many of them are still wearing their hard-earned tarnished Dolphins. If so, their loved ones can take satisfaction in the knowledge that no finer symbol of duty faithfully preformed exists... Anywhere.

The Old Man will be Ordering the Linehandlers Topside in Ten by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Remember that? You would crawl topside into a world of fresh air and salt spray. You knew how much time you had by how far you were from Thimble Shoals Light... Or the position angles on Old Point Comfort, the light on the Cavalier Hotel or the concrete emplacements that made up Fort Wool.

After the Topside Gang popped up out of fore and aft hatches, the Leading Seaman made his way along the deck, busting open the line lockers with his "T" wrench. Controlling the "T" wrench was the symbol of the first step... The first rung on the

ladder leading to the level of absolute power that would someday culminate in being crowned as the Chief of the Boat. The COB was for all intents and purposes the omnipotent Kahn of the After Battery Huns and assorted Mongols berthing in other locations in his cylindrical iron kingdom.

The "T" wrench was a device that ranked on par with the scepter of ancient Babylonian kings or the power of the headsman's axe in the Tower of London.

"OK, ladies, don't take all gahdam night... Break out your lines and fake 'em down."

"Hey Conaty, knock open that pressure locker and haul some heavies up here."

"Aye, Bwana... Anything you say, boss man."

"Hey Jack, when we get in, you wanna haul your worthless but up to Bells and get a hamburger and a fast snoot load?"

"Naw... Got the damn duty. Going to stay aboard... And hang around in the maneuvering room while they toss in a charge."

"How 'bout you, Peto?"

"Yeah, if you'll spot me to a couple of pitchers till the Disbursing Officer shows up tomorrow with our blue checks."

"Knock off the bullshit, darlings... And wet down your heavies."

"Christ awmighty... It'll be damn near 45 minutes until we round NOB and head up the damn river..."

"Hey Horsefly... Toss that sonuvabitch off up near the bow planes. If that sonuvabitch gets wrapped around a shaft or caught up in a screw, you'll follow it like you were shot out of a damn catapult."

"Hey, loan me your "T" wrench so I can test the niggerhead and the after capstan."

(Wonder what they call the forward capstan now? You can bet your thirteen button blues, the term 'niggerhead' has been replaced with a far more acceptable term.)

When boats come alongside today at midnight I'll bet you don't hear,

"Look alive... Throw a couple of turns around the niggerhead and take in the slack on number one."

"Hey Stuke... That another boat forward?"

"Yeah Horsefly... Looks like either the Cutlass or Grampus."

"He's sure as hell making liberty turns."

"Okay gents, we'll be rounding carrier row shortly. Take a good look at the high-priced Navy... Look at the size of those bastards... You could blow the bottom out of one of 'em and it would probably take two weeks for the sonuvabitch to sink, like getting rid of Chicago by digging gopher tunnels."

"Naw... Those damn hanger decks are just empty space. You slap a torpedo in the elevator on one of those monsters and it would fill up like a toilet tank."

"You know for idiot E-3s, you guys sure are experts on a whole lot of crap you know absolutely nothing about."

"Stow it... Nobody ever listens to or pays attention to anybody racking aft of the mess decks."

"Hey Chief... There's your old lady standing on the pier. Anyone ever tell you what a lucky bastard you are? They didn't turn out a lot of gals as faithful as Alice... You got a real keeper."

"Put your lines over when you can..."

Heavies flew through the air and bounced across the deck of the outboard boat in the nest. Then you bent on the smaller line to your mooring hawser and watched it snake it's way across the expanse between the two boats. Upon arrival, some nameless, faceless jerk just like you dropped the spliced eye in the line over a cleat. You tossed two turns around the socially unacceptable, named hydraulic rotational device and watched the distance slowly decrease until you were home, resting tank tops to tank tops.

"Double up all lines... Secure the anchor detail."

"Attention all hands... Would the lucky ape who had 23 in the anchor pool, see the exec and collect his magic beans."

"Would the mail runner in section three muster in control. Liberty for sections one and two commences immediately. If your ID card does not have a photo of you sporting a beard, shave it off... Any gear adrift in two hours will be found in the lucky bag auction Monday... The Captain wishes to remind all hands that the speed limit through Gloucester Virginia has been set to fleece the fleet. Mail call in ten minutes."

"Hey any you guys on Sirago spare a smoke for an American bluejacket home from the sea?"

Submarine sailors are among the most generous people on the planet. I never saw a lad who didn't share his smokes or deny another boatsailor access to his beer pitcher. How many times did you call it a night in some gin mill and toss what was left between you and payday in the middle of the table and say,

"Take care of the barmaid and invest the rest in a couple of pitchers."

"Hey below."

"Yo..."

"How'bout getting a couple of non-quals run up some hot coffee."

"You got it."

How many nights? Hell, you were home... Your brow attached you to the rest of the known world... The showers were open... Fresh milk was coming aboard... Turn on the porch light and put out the cat...

You were home.

Rainlockers and Rainbow Soap by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Smokeboat showers were designed by an undertaker who buried Munchkins, or some bastard who turned out phone booths for the relatives of Snow White's dwarfs. You had to Vaseline your butt to turn around in one of the sonuvabitches.

Water squirted in your ear at the rate of a blue jay taking a pee and the men in the forward engine room who made the freshwater, would threaten to kill you and all your unborn children if you took more than sixty seconds to satisfy your immediate personal hygiene needs. Diesel submarines took an hour to produce 50 gallons of pure water.

This was just enough to satisfy the needs of 252 tons of wet lead-acid batteries and produce a reasonable mildew crop in sour towels.

When a smokeboat was turning out fresh water, the stills (evaporators) produced heat at twice the Dante's inferno level, which in turn produced hot, sweaty, foul smelling enginemen and machinist mates. These stinking, ugly bastards kept watch on the use of fresh water tighter than parents keeping an eye on their seventeen-year-old daughter's virginity.

The standard practice aboard diesel submarines was to secure the showers except for one reserved for the exclusive use of cooks, messcooks and the corpsman. The secured showers were used for potato storage. Messcooks would come aft to cut holes

in the bags holding the spuds and fill pots. After several weeks, the deck between the shower stalls and the crew's sinks was covered with cut up gunnysacks.

You could run a sink full of water and take what was commonly known in the old boatservice as a 'douche-down'... A birdbath... Armpits, face, and that was about it. Going without regular showers was one of the rough adjustments you had to make to ride smokeboats. There were no women... You take the presence of women out of the equation and it takes about twenty minutes for men to revert to cavemen and develop the vocabulary of sewer digger parrots... And the personal hygiene characteristics of primates.

When you're a submariner, there's no way to replace stuff you run out of at sea. There are no roving 7-11 boats that run around the North Atlantic selling cigarettes, toiletries and Playboy magazines. I have seen men read magazines with missing critical pages... Read paperback novels being passed around in three or four sections... I have seen men read the ingredients on the side of cereal boxes being that starved for the printed word.

I've seen guys dig through a tuna can butt kit wired to the bunk chain at the head of their rack and fish out butts to strip, to pack a pipe for a smoke.

That brings us to rainbow soap. There is a point in the life of any bar of soap... Near the end where you can damn near see through it. People abandon soap in the last stages of its useful life. It's hard to toss something that isn't all the way gone, so every After Battery head had a load of soap slivers. If you ran out of soap six weeks out, you could create a bar in the same way lumber companies make plywood. You would stack seven or eight slivers together and compress them into something resembling a multi-ply, multi-colored bar of soap... Hence the term 'rainbow soap'.

We learned that razor blades could be resharpened by rocking them back and forth with your forefinger in a glass or coffee cup. We sewed peacoat buttons on with dental floss. And wrote letters on the back of DRT tracing paper and maneuvering board plots.

It was called making do... Inventing 'make-do' was a part of submarine sailing back then.

I once knocked a boot heel off on a ladder, clearing the bridge. Unlike nuke boats, we didn't carry a duty cobbler who fixed boots. I tried to reattach the heel with two flat head screws. Bad idea... They dug a divot out of my heel the size of the Grand Canyon. I finally unbolted the unsuccessful make-do and ripped off the other heel. I spent the better part of the three weeks remaining looking like I was wearing Aladdin's shoes.

As the leading seaman, I once used my web belt to lash down a line locker lid whose lock down bolt was screwed up by a practice depth charge, allowing it to flop back and forth next to a hull (NLM) noise level monitor.

We cut gaskets out of red rubber hot water bottles, using a tuna can for a pattern. We made gland packing out of an oil-soaked chunk of cut up heaving line. Nukes never had to do that kind of stuff.

One boat ran out of toilet paper and used pages from rate correspondence courses, and some back issues of 'All Hands'.

We were good at what we did. With all the attention given to our nations great undersea technological achievement, it is important for those of us who rode those old worn out smokeboats to remember that we took them to sea and kept nursing the bastards through their old age years and invented the 'make-dos' that got us by. It was what we did and defined us as what we were. We were lads who prided ourselves on getting by, who leveled out the rough spots, put up with the cramped quarters, dead air, lack of gentility, loss of contact, roaches, dirty laundry, leaks, heat, hot sacking, and hard riding in heavy seas, simply because of the pride we had in being able to call ourselves 'pigboat sailors.'

Save your sweat-soaked dungarees, the smokeboats and hydraulic oil-laced coffee will rise again.

Once Upon a Time There Was a Sub Base New London by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

It's been 45 years since I stepped down from a big gray bus in a parking lot beside Dealey Center... Me and a herd of idiots just like me. I had a fresh green seabag full of what in those days was called 'original issue'.

Most of it was still covered with little white stickers that read...'Inspected by number 19'... It smelled like I was peddling mothballs and contained two things I never fully understood or appreciated, a flat hat and something that looked like a squirrel lariat ... Called 'clothes stops'.

"OK listen up and when your name is called answer 'Aye'. In case you haven't noticed, I ain't your gahdam mother. I won't explain stuff to you jaybirds and I'm not in the habit of repeating. If you don't get it the first time you'll accept the consequences. When I ask you a question the only proper response will be an affirmative, 'Aye'. Am I fully understood?"

"Aye."

"Now answer up..."

"Murphy, A.C."

"Aye."

"Rubenstein, R.J."

"Aye."

"Cummings, P.J."

"Yo."

"Cummings, see me after this formation... And consider yourself to be the first idiot bastard in Class 182 to make my Grommet Squad."

Grommet Squad was a polite inoffensive way of saying anal sphincter detail. In my ten weeks I became the undisputed King of the Grommet Squad.

"OK, let me put you stupid sonuvabitches in tune with your present relationship with the rest of the universe. You dumb bastards have volunteered for service in diesel submarines. You have, of your own stupidity, signed up to become fleas on a dying dog. Volunteering for diesel submarines following the dawn of the age of nuclear power is the same as leaving a Ford dealership with your ass parked in a donkey-powered buckboard."

"They are turning smokeboats into razor blades and bra hooks as fast as humanly possible. After you toss your gear aboard your first 'SS' boat, don't be surprised if that beady-eyed ferret Rickover doesn't jerk the sonuvabitch out from under you before you get to Trim and Drain on your qual card."

Note - This was 1959, prior to Rickover being elevated to sainthood. To the old petroleum burning boatservice he was simply 'Rickover, the beady-eyed ferret.' The diesel force was never big on proper etiquette, decorum and civil expression.

"Now ladies, pick up your gear and this Second Class skivvie-waver Archer will take you up to Barracks 141 and 142, issue your racks and show you where to stow your gear. Mess deck opens at 1130 hours for noon chow. Be there. Uniform of the day, undress whites. That'll be it for now. God, you're a sorry-ass mob."

Then this red-headed, freckle faced, loudmouth bastard, Second Class Signalman with fresh dolphins, took over.

"My name is Elbert Archer and I will be marching you to all your various assignments. Now sling your gear."

'Archer The Marcher' was a sawed off mental defective with an exceptionally shrill voice who visualized himself with power equivalent to the Emperor of Mongolia... Up until week three, when Jack Banks, a former 'All Philadelphia' High School tackle, punched

his nasal passages into his colon. After that Archer The Marcher became most polite and deferential.

The old basic Sub School is gone now, victimized by the wrecking ball of 'time marches on' progress. That of course is total and absolute horse manure.

There is something called historic preservation. Rich folks are out there standing on top each other to preserve everything from Dolly Madison's corset to Davy Crockett's outhouse.

That architecturally ugly brick building was the enlisted alma mater of Tom Brokaw's Greatest Generation of submarine sailor. Graduates of that brick stucture went to sea and torpedoed the heart out of Hirohito's Navy and Merchant Marine. They, and they alone are the principal reason that the floor of the Pacific, looks like Sanford and Son's front yard. If any structure in this fair land deserved restoration and preservation, it was the Basic Enlisted Submarine School.

When they tore the old girl down, John Wynn... The overgrown shoemakers' elf of 40 School Street, sent me a brick. On a good night, when you can get good reception from Hell, I can hold that brick up to my ear and hear Chief Bates tell me what a worthless excuse for a bluejacket I am. Makes me feel wanted.

So, Archer The Marcher led us up the five million concrete steps, past the old brick Sub School, past Rock Lake to Barracks 141 and 142.

We got assigned aluminum lockers the size of your mothers' breadbox, and racks that had "head" and "feet" stenciled on each end. I thought, if this course is geared to the intelligence level of idiots who don't know that their feet are on the other end of their body from their head...this thing should be a cakewalk for a guy from East Tennessee.

A lot of guys "devolunteered" a bullshit term for quit. Some lads, who had the heart without the ability to comprehend, flunked out. I had no use for the quitters. They wasted a lot of people's time before popping out of the weak sisters closet.... but, I bled in my socks for the lads sent packing who truly had their heart set on becoming submariners. I hated to be present when they cleaned out their lockers...turned in their bedding and rolled back their mattresses. Some were good men we never saw again.

I won't bore you with the details of the training. You were there. It must have been outstanding, because we never forgot it.

There are a few questions I have about New London.

How difficult was moving the base from New London to Groton? And, was that trip absolutely necessary?

Next, why, on the finest Sub Base on the entire planet is a submarine sandwich called a Hoagie or a Grinder?

What ever happened to "Seven Brothers" and Rhinegold beer..."My beer is Rhinegold the dry beer ...think of Rhinegold whenever you buy beer." What in the hell is dry beer?...Do you pee dust"? Who stole the Raghat Club or did it fall off the truck when you nukes moved the base to Groton?

How bout Mrs. Martha's' down in Old Saybrook where Mrs. Martha and her girls marketed carnal delight in increments of thirty minutes for damn near a half months' E-3 pay?

Anyone ever figure out why Yankees put cheddar cheese on apple pie and why a kid from St. Elmo Tennessee couldn't find grits for breakfast? How bout scrapple? What in the hell is that stuff, possum Spam?

What happened to the Coast Guard Station out on the point? I think it was some kind of shallow water sailors' boot camp.

In 1959 E-3s made \$34.00 every two weeks. That damn near doubled when you were assigned to a boat. At that kind of money you wore out shoes instead of automobile tires. Three Slim Jims and four draft beers was one helluva night on the town.

We were young...bulletproof twenty feet tall. Most of us went on to become qualified sumariners. We got no signup bonuses ...no prospect of future education benefits...Nobody told us or promised us anything but the opportunity to become submarine sailors...We didn't get a shoebox load of geedunk ribbons and meaningless badges.

What we got was right to sit in smoky bars drinking beer with our own kind, listening to scratchy juke box music and telling stories about high seas, cold weather and rough times spent inside worn-out boats with the finest men we would ever know.

What we didn't know at the time was that damn near half a century later, we would return to where it all began...older, hauling a helluva lot more lard...gray...gray haired with the best women ever made by our sides to do what we always did best ...drink beer and lie to each other.

We can use terms like MBT, SSR, UQC, ten pound blower, BLR mast, GDU and After Trim knowing that every sonuvabitch in the house knows exactly what we're talking about.

Proud to be here with my fellow Deepwater U. Alumni here. Here in New London, Groton or somewhere over the rainbow or whatever they call this place now...to share our history and remember, using memories known only to those of us who lived it. When all

is said and done we are the only keepers of our history and traditions. With us the history of cold war diesel service will fade into obscurity.

We rode the boats at a time long ago when corpsman cured everything with an APC.... when you could identify boat sailors by the hydraulic oil stains in their raghats...When the old grizzly bastards who won World War II wore nekkit lady tattoo's, drank cheap whiskey wore bellbottoms with gusset lacing and carried belt knives in working dungarees. Back when the Chief of the Boat sitteth on the right hand of the Father and had been given "walk the plank" authority by the United States Navy. Back when barmaids wore pop-up bras and Radio-Girl dime store perfume and would sell you a twenty-five dollar "welcome home" after a Northern Run.

Back when nobody had to tell us we were the finest damn submarine sailors on the planet...We knew it because we were the direct descendents of the giants who stomped Hirohito flat.

We had survived the firey sheep dip of the New London School and gone forth to scare hell out of old women and small dogs.

That brings us to tonight's burning question. There is something we old smokboat bastards would like to know...you nukes can share your secret with us...we won't tell. How in the hell did you guys figure out how to burn down a 150 foot steel tank full of water? And now that you have accomplished that...how does a drunken E-3 find his way back to the base? And last what do you tell new guys that contraption on the base insignia is? .

When Hull Numbers were our Addresses

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

After the evening meal, when the messcooks were washing and stacking dishes and the guys in the duty section were desperately trying to find three more guys for a card game, I used to climb topside.

We always kept a couple of empty MEK cans tucked in the superstructure. In the 1950's, empty five-gallon cans were 'topside furniture'.

God designed the E-3 butt to fit the bottom of empty 5 gallon cans. They could be padded with a folded up foulweather jacket and made comfortable enough to park your butt on and listen to five or six innings of a ballgame or waste an hour or so in totally forgettable conversation with the topside watch.

If things got so damn boring and you started to hear your toenails grow or found yourself watching a spider build a web between your dungaree pant leg and a line locker lid, you could break suction with the paint can and take a stroll on the pier, or go steal stuff off the Orion... USS Orion (AS-18).

It was customary to wander down by the dumpsters. The dumpsters served a purpose similar to waterholes on the Serengeti Plains in Africa. It was the location where all the SubRon Six loose animals gathered at sundown.

Every boat's messcooks hauled their garbage buckets out for dumping, to catch a smoke or two and exchange the verbal bullshit that passed for squadron news.

"Hey Dago... What the hell happened to Old Tangle Toes?"

"Sumbitch went nuke on us."

"No shit?"

"No shit... Up and went nuke. Bastard tossed his gear on the gahdam George Washington."

"What the hell is the George Washington? I thought subs were supposed to be named for fish or denizens of the deep?"

"Not nukes... You can name nukes after guys on folding money... Small town barbers, the days of the week, animals in commercials or Mexican motorcycle parts."

"Why did he wanna go nuke on us?"

"Said it was a smart career move."

"Somebody musta put him up to it... The sonuvabitch didn't have enough sense to figure that out for himself."

"I remember when the idiot wuz gonna buy a damn Oldsmobile that came with payments bigger than his gahdam pay rate."

"Yeah... He'll do great in the nuke navy."

"How's your sister?"

"Pregnant as hell."

"Pregnant... How'n the hell did she get pregnant?"

"Usual way... Girls in Ohio haven't figured out the relationship between Ford backseat action and childbirth."

"She gonna keep it?"

"I doubt it."

"Anybody here off the Cubera?"

"Yeah, whatcha need?"

"Nuthin', just wanted to know what went on over there this afternoon."

"Some kid was selected for OCS... Knife and Fork School. Good kid... Deserved it."

It was the nightly gathering of the fraternal order of the SubRon 6 Pier Rats. Men in faded shirts, soft dungarees and frayed raghats sharing smokes and swapping bullshit in what would become a lifetime of friendship.

From time to time a shrill Bosun's pipe would sound out on the tender...

"Orion arriving."

Or...

"Orion departing."

Or...

"Change into the uniform of the day."

Changing into the uniform of the day to the men who rode the old smokeboats in the nests outboard the Orion was simple. You took the Marlboro tucked behind your right ear and switched it to behind your left ear.

"The Navy mobile canteen truck is on the pier... Attention, the mobile canteen truck is on the pier."

Ah, the Navy Mobile Canteen Truck. They made hamburger patties that were tougher than the heel on a lumberjacks's boot. On a hot day, the mayonnaise was rancid, potato chips went limp and all the candy bars went soft... But the sonuvabitch was the only game in town. And, when you were an E-3, it was the only gahdam thing in the United States Navy that came to you, instead of you going to it.

Standing in line at the roach coach, I saw my first commercial beef jerky. 'Uncle Jack's Genuine Smoky Mountain Beef Jerky'. Did'ja ever see an Egyptian mummy with the wrapping peeled off? Looks just like Uncle Jack's Jerky. Two cellophane packs of King Tut hide would get you through a four hour topside watch... A little fact you missed if you went to the Naval Academy. Guys off the Argonaut called 'em Navajo Knee Scabs.

The roach coach had bald tires... Never understood that. Damn Navy was buying great big monster ships at ten gazillion bucks a pop and the damn geedunk wagon was hauling stuff on baloney skin tires. Later I figured out why.

No guys wearing heavy duty shoulder boards were ever out there pushing and shoving in line, yelling,

"Hey Horsefly, you gonna take all damn day?"

"Hey dumbass, when you order a gahdam cheeseburger you don't have to say... 'That's with cheese', you idiot."

Yep, never heard that Second Class, whatever he was, yell,

"Admiral wants a Doctor Death Special with fries and a Yoo-Hoo."

Naw, it was just raghats with salt stained armpits in any line I was ever in on pier 22. Most of us were driving bald tires on our cars so the roach coach just fit right in.

Women used to visit the pier. In those days nobody worried about a bunch of camel jockeys with differed dental work turning up to blow your ass up, so on balmy summer nights, women used to turn up strolling the pier... Usually with some lucky bastard in tow.

Watching women was called simply 'Out checking your traps'. It was simple, cheap and harmless... Well, not so harmless if you slipped up and layed a wolf whistle on a four-striper's daughter or said, "Nice tits for an over the hill honey." within earshot of the Force Commander's wife. Do that once and you might find yourself shoveling ballast on a New York garbage barge.

Each SubRon Six boat had at least six semi-pro non-rated tit evaluators. You could find them topside with their worthless butts parked on empty stores crates judging every set of tits roaming the pier.

"Now there's a set of nines."

"Naw, back in Cleveland those wouldn't even get her an eight."

"Okay... Settle for an eight point two."

Old Chief's used to catch you and your fellow E-3 idiots with your worthless butts perched on big iron bollards.

"Son, sittin' on cold metal will give you a bad case of hemorrhoids."

"Sure Chief."

Folks, Chiefs no speak with forked tongue. Took damn near 50 years, but my previously paid for package finally arrived. I must've ordered the jumbo economy size... The Pier

22 whoppers. But back to women ogling, sometimes some really good-looking woman would come up to you and say,

"Do you know where I could find Charley Turner? He serves aboard the USS So-In-So and does something with electricity."

"No Ma'am... Me and my buddy here just got in. We've been underwater for the last year and a half and most of the guys we knew before we shoved off either died, went nuke, wangled a shore duty billet or married a nympho barmaid and moved to Chicago."

(Adrian Stuke, my forever running mate, lied a lot. But, he made them smile and that was step one in the Stuke method outlined in his international best seller, *Earning Dolphins and Getting in Goodlooking Women's Pants.*)

"Excuse me sailor, do you know where I could find Capt. Whatchmacallit on Com Dink Doo Lant Staff?"

"No sir, just got in from playing 36 holes with CinCLant and waiting for a ride to the airport to take me to a chess tournament in Indianapolis. One of those guys in that Canteen Truck line might be able to help you. I think they live here."

You had to be nineteen with everything you owned in the entire world crammed in three homesteaded side lockers in an After Battery or stuffed in a dented upright locker in Bells Locker club, to find bullshitting wandering visitors, totally amusing.

Hanging around the dumpster allowed you to find out what movies were being shown on what boat that evening. It was a messcook's job to know what movie was being shown on his boat and what the night baker would be turning out about 0100 that night. The latter info was critical if you were standing a 12-4 topside that night.

"Wooooo-weee-ooogh"

"The Orion will be starting *SPLENDOR IN THE GRASS* starring Natille Wood, on the boatdeck in ten minutes."

"Wooooo-weee-ooogh"

Watching a film on the Orion's boatdeck was a lot like attending a gahdam kiddie matinee in Chinatown. You couldn't hear a damn thing because every sonuvabich was a comedian and there were no officers or CPOs.

The officers preferred to watch them in the air-conditioned wardroom with stewards bringing them little silver plated dishes of ice cream and refilling their coffee cups.

The Chiefs preferred going ashore, drinking combustible liquids and removing lingerie from ladies who really looked scary after the sun came up.

So the nightly movie on the Orion's' boat deck was always a kind of idiots free for all.

Somewhere around 2100 the 'Goddess Of The Main Induction' put the Pier to bed. The officers were home getting wrapped around their second scotch. The bluejackets were watching movies, working on quals, wrapped up in some correspondence course or playing cards.

The drunks started rolling in about midnight and assigned personnel reporting aboard started arriving along with the bread truck and doughnut man.

During the night, especially when the bastards were blasting the gahdam Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel or it was one of those godawful high humidity summer nights, I used to get up... Grab two cups of that stronger than King Kong coffee (One for me and one for the Topside Watch) and head topside.

I would spell him while he dropped down in the bear trap and took a leak through the limber holes next to the impulse flasks.

We were young. Being a Smokeboat Boatsailor was a young mans game or a Lifers's way of life. Squadron Six was the Briar Patch where a lot of us paid our National obligation dues and grew from boyhood to the men we became. Looking back... they were damn fine days.

Night Steaming by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Between exercises or heading to or from station, we'd run on the surface.

Best sleeping anywhere was getting rocked to sleep during night steaming. Light swell... Just drifting along with the surface state. Advances in technology took that away from boatsailors along with sunrises and sunsets. Again, I'm glad I served when and where I did.

I remember laying in my rack feeling the slow roll and the gentle rise and fall of the bow... The sound of the water rushing through our limber holes, sloshing around above us in the superstructure, and cascading out and over the tank tops.

When someone passing fore or aft, opened the Forward Engine Room watertight door you got a brief span of Fairbanks roar then 'slam-click' and it was quiet again.

As crewmen passed through the air lock door in the forward end of the compartment, you got a brief moment of conversation, laughter, clatter of dishes, ring of silverware or movie dialog... The late night sounds of the messdeck.

There was also the intermittent bits and pieces of head conversations and passageway conversation.

Sometimes the Below Decks Watch would come through to 'tap out' the ongoing watch...

"Hey Jack... Time to roll out for your watch."

"Screw you and the horse you rode in on."

"No babe... It's time... Don't make me have to drag your worthless, good fer nuthin' butt outta that rack."

"I'm up ... I'm up..."

And you would hear feet hitting the deck and some poor half-awake bastard hunting his sea boots and foul weather jacket with the light from his Zippo.

"Hey you goofy sonuvabitch, people are trying to get some gahdam sleep."

"Yeah, yeah, and some people are trying to go to work."

"You don't have to sound like gahdam elephant sex to round up your gear."

To the uninitiated, this would sound like hostility. To any raghat who rode smokeboats, it will bring back memories of the friendly exchange of nighttime pleasantries... The pointless bullshit that passes for a late night, "Howdy-Doo"

Your sleep was interrupted by junk falling that was stored, make that stuffed, above the overhead lines... Film cans, books, shoes, boots, all kind of loose crap.

Guys making head calls and waking you up to bum a pack of smokes or get something out of a sidelocker.

And every now and then, one of the resident migratory roaches would take a shortcut across your face or homesteaded in an ear or nostril.

And there were the smells... Stale cigarette smoke, mildew from condensate... Accumulated dirty laundry... Fresh coffee, brewing in the crews' mess... Night baking smells... No.2 inboard venting... And eau de diesel that permeated everything.

"AHHOOGAH, AHHOOGAH... DIVE, DIVE!"

And you would hear the vents open.

As the boat slid below the surface with the sound of rushing air leaving the tanks, it got quiet... except for the cycling of the vents in series and pockets of trapped air gurgling their way to the upper part of the Main Ballast Tanks... and Negative being blown to check decent when the desired depth was reached.

And of course there was walrus snoring and the sounds made by 15 guys earning Chinese coolie wages plus sub, sea and foreign duty pay... Dreaming of barmaids, car payments and wondering how the family, their ball clubs and bird dogs were doing... And the single guys falling off to sleep wondering who in the hell knew where they were, what they were doing and gave a damn... And who was unbuttoning the blouse of their high school sweetheart at the drive-in these days.

That was night steaming back in the Cro-Magnon era of smokeboat sailing.

Messcooking on Smokeboats by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Many people... those who actually never did it... have a confused idea about the submarine messcook. They think that a messcook was at best a flunky assigned menial tasks because he was some kind of mental defective jaybird or some miscreant jerk being punished ala Army KP variety.

The Navy decided early on that putting idiots and pissed off people on boats serving food was a bad idea. I have often wondered how many tough hardboiled, hard as nails Army Non Coms have any idea how many dead flies, mouse turds and boogers they consumed in the course of a career that were served to them by smiling guys they stuck on KP for punishment. It would have to be calculated in increments of tons.

First, the selection process for submarines eliminates the low I.Q. sub-par folks with the intellect of Hostess Twinkies... they end up at one of those bootcamps where they issue you a shovel.

Messcooking is an art... a theatrical art. You audition for the part before 70 to 80 raging maniacs... your crew.

It is a form of animal taming that you do without a chair and whip. It has less to do with cooking than it does with two-man crowd control.

I learned the art from an absolute master... Adrian Stuke. If there is ever a submarine messcook hall of fame, it will have a forty foot bronze statue of the great Stookey-Man greeting the incoming visitors with a recorded rendition of his actual voice yelling "Park yer' butt and pipe down."

If you were non-rated, either qualified or non-qualified, you messcooked in rotation. Messcooking was an equal opportunity profession. If you were E-3 and below and had a masters degree in astro physics, a doctorate in crown princess' gynecology and a fortune rivaling the Sultan of Persia, you messcooked. There was no appeal process. Your name simply found it's way to the non-prejudicial merry-go-round known as 'Watch, Quarter and Station Bill'. It was that simple. Nothing that you would ever encounter in life would be that fair and that simple other than the mechanical operation of bra hooks.

What did messcooks do? I am glad that you asked that question, since I apprenticed under the absolute master as previously described. I feel totally qualified to answer your question.

(A.) Messcooks, first and foremost, herded the incoming chowhounds into the individual Formica-topped tables in the messdeck, in the same manner as cattle are moved into the designated feedlots at the Chicago stockyards. The tables have been previously set with Pyrex dishes and silverware with at least two fork tines going in the same direction. In rough seas red rubber mats were rolled out on the messdeck tables to keep the dishes from doing the North Atlantic Cha-Cha all over hell and half Georgia.

(B.) Next, they served the salad they had previously made.

Preparing salad was a messcook's job. Before my 19th birthday, I learned several culinary skills known only to the finest chefs of Europe. Stuke taught me how to bang a head of lettuce down on the counter on its stalk end making it simple to remove.

And... how to peel the green hide off a cucumber then take a fork and score the sides so that when you slice the damn thing, poker chip fashion the edges looked like gear teeth. After two tours, I was a regular Martha Stewart.

Sometimes we misjudged the amount of salad that would be required for a setting. For example, take rough weather... state five seas running... boat girating like a washing machine in the rinse cycle... smell of gastric juice and previously eaten meals wafting forward from the After Battery head. These were indicators of a light turnout, so we didn't prepare a lot of salad.

Sometimes we under estimated the turnout. Stuke found a solution to the situation. He would yell,

"Listen up... I put a toenail in the salad. Five bucks for the guy who finds the toenail."

Suddenly salad consumption fell off considerably. Everyone aboard Requin knew instinctively that Adrian was perfectly capable off tossing a toenail in the salad. We did stuff like that in the pre nuclear Sub Force. Today, any messcook who pulled off something like that would probably end up in 'acceptable behavior' rehab training.

We served the meals when the animals in each sitting were seated and situated. Absent the civilizing influence of the fairer sex, the prescribed Emily Post gentility rules were forgotten. Elbows on the table, napkins poked in dungaree shirt pockets instead of on the lap and conversing with a mouthload of meatloaf were approved messdeck etiquette. Most of us had to undergo civility retraining by brides as we acquired them.

There was always some jaybird who would say something to the effect that,

"Mother used to make this dish like...."

"Frank, I know this will come as a complete surprise to you but when your mother was cooking, truckers would take the bypass around your hometown to keep from smelling her cooking."

Or the cook would come out of the galley and knock out the lad's plate in the sharpshooter bucket and say,

"Sorry I offended your delicate pallet... go eat down the street."

This is where lion taming technique came in real handy.

After the meal, the messcooks were the solid waste specialists...either first and second loaders on the "garbage gun" (GDU or garbage disposal unit.) Or if we were riding on the surface, we would check with the diving officer and request permission to assemble and toss one and two way trash over the side.

Trash dumping at sea was a highly skilled trade... like knuckle ball pitching and cobra breeding.

In those days, as trash and garbage accumulated in the boat, it just stacked up everywhere. You lived with your disposable refuse until you could hit the surface and launch the stuff over the side.

These were the pre Woodsie Owl, EPA days before anyone gave a damn about tons of garbage, medical waste and trash floating in the world's oceans. In those days, you plowed through all sorts of assorted crap snorkeling around out there. As a lookout, I saw oil drums, phone poles and once off the mouth of a South American river, a half submerged bright red VW bug.

Messcooking kept you down inside the warm boat when the guys on the bridge were freezing their cajones off. It provided you access to hot coffee and leftover cake. It gave you an opportunity to 'Jackass Jaw' the entire crew, three times a day. It allowed you to get a handful of the first tray of hot cinnamon buns to emerge from the night baker's oven. And, it provided the forum where lasting friendships were formed.

Nobody in the crew ever forgot the really good messcooks.

Night Steaming on Tropical Nights by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There is nothing more beautiful than one of those tropical sunsets. They are whatever term is a step up from spectacular. I've seen some of God's most unbelievable Technicolor work, standing lookout 150 miles south of Key West.

In the early 50's, Richard Rogers composed a score to accompany a joint Navy / NBC presentation called *Victory At Sea*. The musical accompaniment of that historical

accounting of the Navy's global effort in World War II, has since become an American classic, still available in recording stores today.

The recurring theme of the production later had lyrics added and was given the popular title *No Other Love have I.*

There were balmy nights where you stood in the shears with nothing between your chin and your bellybutton, but a pair of optical 7x50s on a frayed binocular strap.

On nights like that, *No Other Love have I* played over and over very gently in the void behind my eyelids. Once in while watching the soft rise and fall of Bow Buoyancy, as we sliced through the azure blue saltwater like a surgical instrument.

"No other love have I...la, la da la lah..."

"Mr. Whitmore, okay to fire up?"

"Okay...anything out there?"

"Two seagulls and a floating box."

"Yeah, light up."

"Thanks sir."

The ready locker Pall Mall behind the ear was the traditional E-3 giveaway.

The skipper smoked a pipe... an old charred Kaywoodie. He carried it in his leather tobacco pouch stuffed into the right-hand pocket of his khaki pants.

He would remove it from his pants pocket, shift the pouch to his left hand remove his old 'shot to hell' pipe...scoop up a bowl full of tobacco from the pouch and absent mindedly tamp the load into the bowl with his left thumb. The whole process looked strange because he had lost his thumb and forefinger on his right hand when a helicopter rotor blade ripped through the sail of his previous boat. As the story was told, his right thumb and forefinger were pinned in the twisted metal of the fairwater and nearly severed from the rest of his hand. He called the galley and had a cook lay to the Bridge with a sharpened butcher knife to finish the job so he could remove his hand and get some relief. The work was accomplished without the benefit of any anesthetic.

He would fire up his pipe with an old Zippo with a USS Runner insignia and snap it shut...take a draw and say,

"Gentlemen, it's a good night to be a sailor."

He smoked a brand of tobacco called London Dock. It's weird how worthless information like that, sticks with you for over forty years. Hell, I can still smell it.

"Look at that sunset."

"Aye sir."

"Aye sir."

"God puts some of his best creative effort in sunrises and sunsets...never miss any you don't have to...you never get em back. God only gives you so many and once missed, you never get them back."

Years later...many years later, I would attend a ships' reunion...three days of drinking beer and swapping lies with Mike Hemming, Adrian Stuke and Bobby Ray Knight.

The boat, USS Requin (SS-481) has been turned out to stud in the Ohio River at Pittsburgh. It was a beautiful autumn day that rolled over into a lovely crisp fall evening. As I crossed the brow, I saw the skipper and his old trusty pipe disappear forward of the sail.

I followed.

"Evening, sir"

"Evening, Dex"

"Good night to be a sailor, sir."

"Dex...they were ALL good nights...being a sailor was one helluva great way to make a living."

And we stood there in silence watching God's kaleidoscope of colors and the day disappear into night, wreathed in that wonderful pipe smoke.

There had been many nights before when both of us were far younger.

Warm summer nights off Bermuda or the islands in the Caribbean. Nights where an offshore breeze carried the perfume of tropical vegetation that smelled like the inside of Bridget Bardot's lingerie drawer.

Kids today get enlistment bribes, educational flypaper benefits, and gratuitous medal and ribbon showers. All we got were nature's wonders, world travel with great folks and all the free 'float an anvil' coffee you could drink.

You could fit all your household goods in an ugly canvas bag, and you got a whole wardrobe of free clothes that attracted women like saltwater catnip.

And for no extra charge, they threw in tropical night steaming.

"Where're we heading, sir?"

"Nowhere particular...night steaming on station."

"Just pok'n holes?"

"Just pok'n holes...the Quartermaster will get a LORAN fix at the start of the 4 to 8 and Mr. Schilling will get us on station. We completed the battery charge just before we relieved. First light, we'll rig the torpedo recovery boom."

Remember those nights? Phosphorescent glitter cascading off your tank tops, the smell of hot coffee rising up from below as the night messcook made his way from the Conn to the Bridge balancing three cups of coffee?

The unwritten rule was that the last six cinnamon buns on any tray placed on the Control room chart table belonged to the OD/Diving Officer, Port and Starboard Lookout (or Bow and Stern Planesman, depending the boats' relationship with immediate sea level at the time), the Helmsman, Radar Operator and Quartermaster of the Watch. The Chief, camped out next to the hydraulic manifold was the enforcer. You touch one of the last half dozen pastries on that tray and you would find a loose boot, formerly located on the right foot of the master vent operator, three feet up your colon.

On a night riding surfaced with a tropical full moon, you could read your wristwatch at midnight.

The Caribbean is loaded with tankers. A British sailor once gave me a Royal Navy Stack and House Flag Marking Recognition manual. But like birdwatcher books...all most people care to know is that the sonuvabitch is a bird...and flies.

All deck officers really care about is (a) is it a merchant or naval vessel? (b) estimated Closest Point of Approach...(c) course changes...(d) steady bearing rate or any other indicators of a possible collision...Like say a flashing light message reading "I intend to ram you." and (e) last and most important, is there any chance of jinning up a good highline movie swap at daylight?

In the old days, nobody cared if your wake looked like the path of a Dean Martin sobriety test when you were night steaming on station. All that was required was that you didn't run into anything that could fold bow buoyancy up against the Forward Battery bulkhead or change oceans...Anything else was pretty much okay. Officers never actually said this, but the raghats figured it out.

In tropical waters you ran across cruise liners...big ol' multy-deck fun barges loaded with folks whose combined incomes exceeded the entire naval E-3 payroll.

The O.D. got the signal light up and sent the following message to the bridge of the floating amusement park...

"U.S. submarine...If you hold us on your radar, we will extinguish all running and navigation lights."

This kept us from becoming an attractive nuisance, causing passengers to flock to the rail on side of the ship, yelling,

"Look Ralph, a submarine!"

Fortunately, they were usually far enough away to escape our smell or get a load of the ratty-ass fashion statement we made in our underway foul weather gear.

You could damn near smell the perfume from all those honeys waltzing around on the duty dance deck.

There's nothing like hanging in the shears wearing a dungaree shirt with three pounds of armpit salt encrustation and a half gallon of dried sweat residue and giving off the same aroma as three day old, road kill...and watching little bikini clad darlings doing dives in a heated pool on the O5 deck.

"Someday, that's gonna be me and my old lady."

'Someday' has yet to drop anchor at my address.

Before dawn, the relief watch started arriving on the Bridge.

"Anything happening?"

"Yeah...working two contacts...one out there at two-eight-zero...one damn near hull down at three-two-zero...both opening."

"That's it?"

"Well about an hour ago, we were overhauled and boarded by thirty nympho Amazon pirates that had their way with us and shoved off...disgusting ordeal."

"Next time wake me up...I'm in desperate need of a disgusting ordeal...maybe two."

And you handed the half-asleep bastard your binoculars and layed below.

You passed the obligatory greeting and bullshit with the incoming watch in the Control Room and continued aft.

In the Crew's Mess, you could usually get a cup of that bottom of the pot, midwatch iguana plasma coffee and listen to a little Juanita Chiquita music on the RBO...you remember, that rhythmic, soft, sexy voice music that made you wish that you had paid more attention in Spanish class.

"Well folks...think I'll hit the rack...somebody bust me out for chow in the morning."

It was always great sleeping south of Key West...had something to do with gentle swells and liberty port dreams...big-eyed tanned gals...cold cervesa....big fat seegars...rocket fuel rum.....live and let live, constabulary forces and a series of monetary systems nobody ever understood, beyond the fact that intimate female companionship was measured in minutes multiplied by increments of five Balboas.

Stand by for Heavy Rolls by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

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, sentinel 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 fail 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.

The Slap Slap of Signal Light Shutters

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I saw a piece in a popular magazine awhile ago. It said that the United States Coast Guard had ceased to teach Morse Code. With all the super techno whizbang communication equipment around these days, I guess 'dits' and 'dahs' are looked upon as primitive communication.

That's a damn pity because there is no more comforting sound than the rhythmic slap of the signal light shutters. Watching a competent signalman operate a signal light, to me beats watching a concert violinist or an Olympic medal-winning ice skater.

There was something about nighttime steaming, transiting the open expanse of the world's oceans and exchanging seemingly meaningless flashes of light that in truth, were an exchange of clear, concise messages. The signalman and the gentle click of the signal light shutter louvers...

"Sir, that's the J. W. WEEKS, DD-701."

"Very well. Ask them if LT Al Timberlake is aboard... I went to the academy with Big Al."

"Aye sir..."

"Yessir, he's aboard... LT CDR now."

"Very well. Tell them to relay my compliments and tell Big Al that 'Short Stack' passed him during the midwatch."

Little messages exchanged in darkness. Communication between members of America's great saltwater family. Those fingers of light always made me feel that I was a part of a big organization.

Things that were so much a part of our life, have gone out of existence in the ensuing years. They tell me that torpedomen and quartermasters have joined gunners mates in the lost ratings of yesteryear.

I know nothing lasts forever and that there's nothing worse to subsequent generations than an old bastard reliving cherished memories of the past. But with the navy looking to boost its recruiting, it might be beneficial to revisit some of the things that were so meaningful to the bluejackets who manned our ships long ago.

Tradition is a valuable asset... Not that to honor tradition, you have to set aside technological advance... Not at all. But many of the 'sailor skills' are being discounted. Consider this... In battle, when you lose power and your computer-generated mo-jo is

lost, or your batteries run out... Or the enemy detonates some hootenanny that scrubs your database... Will there be anyone who can take a legitimate sextant observation?

What happens if the bad guys find a way to negate satellite positioning? What happens to the poor bastards bobbing around in a lifeboat with a signalman and an operating flashlight?

How can you call a man an American bluejacket who can't tie a bowline or read flags? At some point, you stop being a bluejacket and become a technician. That's a sad fact, but a fact, nonetheless.

The navy used to sell salt water adventure. It used to fill its recruiting offices with posters of smiling bluejackets visiting exotic ports... Ships at sea... Extolling the qualities found in elite service like submarines.

Now, you see posters promising monetary incentives, education benefits and pledges of high-level technical training. It is not an 'All for the Navy' navy, anymore. It's a 'What's in it for me?' navy. You can see the effect on the boatservice... Interchangeable crews... That's like a shared bride.

Somebody needs to reinitiate the concept of 'a lad and his boat'. I see nuclear power sailors with the names of a dozen boats embroidered on their vests. How can a lad develop love and loyalty to twelve boats? Simple answer... He can't.

We need to figure out some way of reconnecting men with ships. We need to develop, to reestablish the relationship between sailors and their ships. We need to shitcan the term, 'Get my ticket punched on such and such a ship.' I find the term 'ticket punched' repulsive. I rode with men who truly loved the ship. She has been ours for better than 45 years and will continue to be until the day we leave the planet. It is sad that with the 'interchangeable parts' commands of today, a boatsailor doesn't develop the love we were given.

But, as I said earlier, there's nothing worse than a nostalgic old coot who's out of step with the march of time... An old sonuvabitch whose era has come and gone.

But you can't fault a man who loved his service... The men... His wardroom... His boat. An old bastard who can still hear the gentle slap, slap, slap of the bridge signal light shutters.

Hittin' the Beach by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

When we knocked off ship's work, we hit the showers aboard and waited around for evening chow. We had an old Hallicrafters TV hooked up in the crew's mess. Waiting for chow, we watched either Rocky & Bullwinkle or a little children's program produced locally in Norfolk and called (I believe) J. P. Sidewinder. The animals loved Rocky&

Bullwinkle. Deep intellectual thought and conversation were reserved for long boring nights underwater at sea.

So in port, sitting alongside, we watched the flying squirrel, Boris and Natasha, Dudley, Inspector Fenwick and Little Nell, Professor Peabody, and all of Rocky and Bullwinkle's wonderful pals.

“Okay... Okay... Turn off that damn idiot box and clear out so the messcooks can set up for evening chow.”

So, we cleared out and formed a line of ravenous beasts running down the passageway from the messdeck After Battery airlock door, aft to the forward engine room watertight door. The time spent waiting in line was filled with horseplay and major league grabass.

“Attention... The evening meal is being served in the crew's mess. Tonight's meal... Succulent roast pork, savory green beans, mashed potatoes, hot rolls, milk, iced tea or bug juice. Tonight's movie following chow cleanup is Shootout at Deadwood Canyon starring Buck Brown, Dave so-in-so, and the lovely Dorothy Whatchamacallit. The first sitting being served.”

After chow, the lads going on liberty went topside, crossed the brow and disappeared into the night.

If we didn't head for our barracks at J-50, we would head up to 'The Strip'.

The Strip was a three-block Mecca of stores, restaurants, locker clubs and beer joints catering to every sailor's basic needs.

For the most part, the submariners hung out at Bells'. Life was always worth living at Bells'.

In the '50s and '60s, the section of Hampton Boulevard between the gate at the Naval Operating Base and the gate at DesSub Piers, was like the Main Street in an 1870's cow town... A wide-open cow town. It was a neon-illuminated, quarter mile of tree-swinging bluejackets.

The Strip was where the single lads headed when they hit the beach.

Every naval group had its home beer joint. If you weren't a destroyer man, there were certain bars you stayed the hell out of. If you weren't naval air, there were others where you knew you weren't welcome. Submarine sailors hung out at Bells'.

Bells' was home. If you rode a SUBRON SIX boat, Bells' had a seat at the bar to fit your butt.

When you put your lines over and you didn't have the duty, you threw on your dress canvas and headed over to Bells' for beer, Slim Jims and Hank Williams.

"Hey... Anybody wanna buy a beer for a seagoing naval hero back from the sea?"

"Sit down, Eddie... What're you drinking?"

"Take a draft... We had a rough run."

"What kind of rough run?"

"Heavy weather off Newfoundland... Boat rolled over."

"Rolled over? What'n th' hell happened???"

"Both periscopes fell out."

"Hey Eddie, you know why they don't send donkeys to school?"

"Naw..."

"Cause nobody likes a wiseass."

It was always like that. Loud conversation, the clink of glasses, click-click of pool balls, barmaids telling sailors not to pat their fannies, ragging the shore patrols wandering in and out, Johnny Horton singing about the sinking of Bismarck, some idiot extolling the virtues of the New York Giants to a room full of fellow idiots who couldn't give less of a damn.

It was back in the era of Schlitz, Pabst, Hamms, National Bohemian, and Rolling Rock. The days when breakfast following a duty night would consist of Slim Jims, Beer Nuts and a pitcher... The three major food groups.

Bells' was the submariner's fraternity house. Those who patronized Bells' never forgot it... Even if it only lives on in our minds... As a treasured memory.

Some boatsailors took the city bus into Norfolk. They went to either East Main Street, the center of brewed products and sinful activity, or the Granby Theater.

If you were broke, there was the USO. The Norfolk USO was a big room with very comfortable overstuffed brown leather chairs. It was run by older middle-aged 'do-gooder' women who had big boobs and wore sensible old lady shoes. These women appeared to be very interested in church attendance and when you last wrote a letter to your mother. Most naval personnel who came into the Norfolk USO were just looking for a place to take a leak and pick up a bus schedule.

I liked the USO. If you were broke, it was a great place to go. You could get a hot chocolate and sleep in those overstuffed chairs, knowing that nobody was going to shake you awake to handle lines or load stores... And yes, I wrote a few letters.

There was a rundown, on its last legs, amusement park called 'Oceanview'. The only thing keeping the whole place from collapsing was the termites were holding hands. There was no such thing as amusement ride mechanical maintenance at Oceanview. I remember that the worn out seat upholstery on the roller coaster was all patched up with electrician's tape.

There was a vendor who sold great hot dogs using a relish made by his special recipe. It's funny, after all the years, I can still smell those damn hot dogs. Another great memory.

For single guys with no place to go, there was J-50, our submariner's barracks. J-50 was a recently built, state of the art, cubicle-divided barracks. It had a great big monster shower that had an inexhaustible supply of lobster-cooking temperature water and was so big that it could handle populations the size of third-world countries. After six to ten weeks underwater with total soap and water deprivation, breathing dead air and cultivating major BO, a live-steam hose-down was a virtual gift from God.

When Admiral Grenfell homesteaded the top deck of J-50 for his boat sailors, it was like casting the well known pearls before the subsurface swine. It took the animals over a month to become adequately housebroken to barracks life. In the years I was an inmate in the SUBRON SIX wild beast lockup, sailors came and went but the 24-hour poker game went on forever.

There's a line in Rudyard Kipling's Tommy that reads;

An if sometimes our conduct isn't

All your fancy paints,

Why, single men in barracks

Don't grow into plaster saints.

J-50 was a kingdom where you could sleep between clean sheets, listen to your records, get a hot shower, phone out for pizzas, and breathe fresh air. The only downside being when they needed an all hands working party, they knew where to get all the single guys. We were just a phone call and a short bus ride away.

Looking back, it was a great way to grow from boy to man. None of us were aware of it at the time, but we had joined a family that would last a lifetime. I'm glad that I joined the sub force... I've never had any regrets..

Boatsailors and Peacoats by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

You remember them... Those ton and a half monsters that took the annual production of thirty-five sheep to make. Those thick black rascals with black plastic buttons the size of poker chips. The issue coats that drove shore duty chief petty officers stark raving nuts if they caught you with the collar turned up or your gahdam hands in your pockets.

"Hey, you rubber sock, get those gahdam hands outta them damn pockets! Didn't they issue you black leather gloves?"

So, you took your hands out of your pockets and risked digital frostbite rather than face whatever the Navy had in store for violators of the 'No Gahdam Hands In Peacoat Pockets' policy. There's probably a special barracks in Hell full of old E-3s caught hitchhiking in sub-zero weather with hands in peacoat pockets.

As for those leather gloves, one glove always went missing.

"Son, where in th' hell are the gloves we issued you?"

We??? I don't remember this nasty, ugly bastard being at Great Lakes when the 'jocks and socks' petty officers were throwing my initial issue seabag at me and yelling, "Move it!!"

As for the gloves, once you inadvertantly leave one glove on a whorehouse night table or on the seat of a Grayhound bus, the remaining glove is only useful if a tank rolls over the hand that fit the lost glove.

In the days long ago, a navy spec. peacoat weighed about the same as a flat car load of cinder blocks. When it rained, it absorbed water until your spine warped, your shins cracked and your ankles split. Five minutes standing in the rain waiting on a bus and you felt like you were piggy-backing the statue of liberty.

When a peacoat got wet, it smelled a lot like sheep dip. It had that wet wool smell, times three. It weighed three and a half tons and smelled like 'Mary had a little lamb's' gym shorts.

You know how damn heavy a late '50s peacoat was? Well, they had little metal chains sewn in the back of the collar to hang them up by. Like diluted navy coffee, sexual sensitivity instruction, comfortable air-conditioned topside security bungalows, patent leather plastic-looking shoes and wearing raghats configured to look like bidet bowls, the peacoat spec. has been watered down to the point you could hang them up with dental floss. In the old days, peacoat buttons and grocery cart wheels were interchangeable parts. The gear issued by the U.S. Navy was tough as hell, bluejacket-tested clothing with the durability of rino hide and construction equipment tires.

Peacoats came with wide, heavy collars. In a cold, hard wind, you could turn that wide collar up to cover your neck and it was like poking your head in a tank turret.

The things were warm, but I never thought they were long enough. Standing out in the wind in those 'big-legged britches' (bell bottoms), the wind whistled up your cuffs and took away body warmth like a thief. But, they were perfect to pull over you for a blanket when sleeping on a bus or a bus terminal bench.

Every sailor remembers stretching out on one of those oak bus station pews with his raghat over his face, his head up against his AWOL bag and covered with his peacoat. There was always some 'SP' who had not fully evolved from apehood, who poked you with his billy bat and said,

"Hey, YOU!! Get up! Waddya think yer doin? You wanna sleep, get a gahdam room!"

Peacoats were lined with quilted satin or rayon. I never realized it at the time, but sleeping on bus seats and station benches would be the closest I would ever get to sleeping on satin sheets.

Early in my naval career, a career-hardened (lifer) first class gunner's mate told me to put my ID and liberty card in the inside pocket of my peacoat.

"Put the sonuvabitches in that gahdam inside pocket and pin the damn thing closed with a diaper pin. Then, take your heavy folding money and put it in your sock. If you do that, learn to never take your socks off in a cathouse. Them damn dockside pickpockets pat 'cha down for a lumpy wallet and they can relieve you of said wallet so fast you'll never know you've been snookered.

Only a dumbass idiot will clam-fold his wallet and tuck it in his thirteen button bellbottoms. Every kid above the age of six in Italy knows how to lift a wallet an idiot pokes in his pants. Those little bastards leard to pick sailor's pockets in kindergarten.

Rolling bluejackets is the national sport in Italy."

In Washington DC, they have a wonderful marble and granite plaza honoring the United States Navy. Every man or woman who served this nation in a naval uniform, owes it to himself or herself to visit this memorial and take their families.

It honors all naval service and any red-blooded American bluejacket or officer will feel the gentle warmth of pride his or her service is honored within this truly magical place.

The focal point of this memorial is a bronze statue of a lone American sailor. No crow on his sleeve tells you that he is non-rated. And, there are further indications that suggest maybe, once upon a time, the sculpturer himself may have once been an E-3 raghat.

The lad has his collar turned up and his hands in his pockets.

I'm sure the Goddess of the Main Induction nearly wets her panties laughing at the old, crusty chiefs standing there with veins popping out on their old, wrinkled necks, muttering,

"Look at that idiot sonuvabitch standing there with his collar up and his gahdam hands in his pockets. In my day, I would have ripped that jerk a new one!"

Ah, the satisfied glow of E-3 revenge.

Peacoats... One of God's better inventions.

Internal Air a Man Could See by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I catch hell about writing about life on submarines, specifically confining my observations to diesel boat duty. There's a reason for that. I rode leaky old wornout diesel boats... Smokeboats on the verge of scrapyard euthanasia. I don't write about life on nuke subs because I've only been on two... Walked through Nautilus and Toledo... I might as well have been taking a guided tour through a dinosaur colon. I didn't have a clue.

Smokeboat sailors are like cannibals and nukes are like college students. We had as much in common as Hindus and Holy Rollers. I write for the lads who rode petroleum-powered boats that collapsed before reaching 1,000 feet (depth gauges stopped designating depth at 800 feet because the law of physics would have a smokeboat crew shaking hands with marine life at any depth below that).

One thing you didn't see on a moonbeam boat pier were raghats walking around on a hot day in red lead spattered dungarees with a pack of sea store Luckies carried in a twisted tee shirt sleeve. Right about now, old smokeboat sailors are smiling and moonbeamers are asking each other, "What 'n the hell is he talking about?"

Today's modern day sailor grew up in a world that fully understands the negative effects of tobacco smoke. In the 'old days', the navy sold cigarettes to be distributed at sea, in international waters beyond the jurisdiction of all domestic tax authority. In the late '50s, we got 'nickle-a-pack' sea store smokes that were distributed from cases of cartons, stacked prior to issue in the forward torpedo room.

"Attention, all hands... We have cleared the international buoy and sea store cigarettes are being issued forward."

When you arrived in the forward room, there was the Chief of the Boat...

"Okay... Okay... Keep it down. Gahdammit, get into line! Pall Mall smokers up front. Jack, bust open a case of them Pall Malls."

"Hey chief, how 'bout bustin' open a case of Camels? I'm out."

"To hell with you, hacksaw... Bum a smoke off Stuke and get the hell in line."

"Any you bastards smoke Raleighs? Nobody in their right mind smokes gahdam Raleighs... It'll take 35,000 Raleigh coupons to buy an iron lung."

"Hey chief, find out if anyone has Zippo flints."

"Mr. Andrews... JGs hafta' stand in line with the animals... You gotta be a two-striper to go to the head of the line."

"Pipe down, Willie..."

"Mr. Andrews smokes Kents... I thought they only smoked Kents at girl scout camp."

"Girl scout camp and the air national guard."

"You buy two cartons of Kents and you get a free pair of nylon panties."

As the COB handed out the pre-purchased cartons of smokes to the animals lined up in the forward battery passageway, men with armloads of cartons worked their way aft.

Buck a carton Camels, Pall Malls, Winstons, Marlboros, Philip Morris, Tareytons, Kools, and Kents were picked up and hauled aft to be ratholed and squirreled away in bunk and side lockers, above ventilation lines and tucked away under flashpads on bunks.

Diesel boat submariners smoked. We lit up on the bridge topside, at ordered depth, snorkeling, watching depth gauges when operating the bow and stern planes, battle stations after the old man 'lit the lamp', and at morning quarters. Smokeboat sailors smoked.

When the non-rated bottom-feeders (like me) passed through the boat emptying butt kits, it was common to fill an empty sharpshooter bucket with discarded butts.

The atmosphere of an American diesel submarine contained enough of what today is called 'secondhand smoke', that the crews had to clean nicotine film off gauge face lenses. Part of the signature stench of a veteran smokeboat was recirculated cigarette smoke. It permeated everything... Uniforms, peacoats and blankets, to name a few. I would hate to find out what percentage of our breathable atmosphere was oxygen laced with incinerated tobacco gas.

No complaints... No idiot aboard enjoyed an 'authorized smoking lamp' more than I did... And I wasn't alone. There was nothing any more relaxing or satisfying than a smoke and a cup of coffee, strong enough to float three links of your anchor chain.

Most of my most wonderful memories are wrapped around recollections of 'coffee and a smoke' conversations with my butt parked on a padded crews mess potato locker.

Caffine and nicotine seemed to facilitate discussions on very important subjects like the effect of engine stroke, low and outside ball pitching, bust sizes, and sex with fat girls.

Submariners may be the most opinionated rascals inhabiting the planet. They could create controversy out of the 23rd. Psalm. The clowns could argue about anything from the par value of monkey bones in Palu Pango to the Statue of Liberty's panty size. Most of the great discussions, debates, conversations, and heated arguments, were held over cups of King Kong strong, 'bottom of the pot' Maxwell house in a smoke-filled messdeck. We solved complex international confrontational situations by applying the universal submariner solution...

"Just drop The Bomb on the dumb bastards."

Given our propensity for applying the 'bomb the bastards' solution, the guys assembling nuclear ordinance would have had to put on a late shift.

Coffee came in 20 lb. cans. When we loaded stores, we stored the cans outboard the main engines.

Boatsailors love coffee. In a situation where priorities would require choices to be made, diesel submariners would have traded 20 canned hams, their attack scope, the starboard screw, port bow plane, four barmaid house keys, ten whorehouse rain checks, and their corpsman, for a coffee resupply.

Another point needs to be made. Submarine coffee is about as strong as coffee gets before it makes the metamorphic transition to solid granite. Late night, bottom of the pot, midwatch coffee was like liquid asphalt. I came to consider regular restaurant coffee to be one step above iced tea. Real coffee had to have hair, horns and tree bark.

It is fair to say, that the undersea service operated on coffee, diesel fuel and 'nickle a pack' smokes.

Returning to the value of sea store cigarettes...

In Mediterranean liberty ports, cigarettes had a most inflated barter value. It was amazing what a bum boat entrepreneur would offer you for a carton of sea store Camels. One bum boat vendor had an ugly girl in his boat and was pandering her services for four cartons of Luckies.

For a bunch of eighteen or nineteen year old, redblooded American heterosexual, testosterone-loaded bluejackets who had spent the better part of four weeks filling their lungs with snorkel air, this appeared to be a wonderful bargain. That is to say, it seemed to be a heaven-sent transaction until the Chief of the Boat showed up topside and announced that any member of ship's company who ventured beyond our tank tops, would see no liberty for the next six weeks. That, and a closer look at this offered darling killed all erotic desire. She was old, had a nice crop of upper lip hair, scraggly unwashed hair, and a face like Jack Palance.

It will seem silly, irrelevant and of little or no importance to the uninitiated to discuss the relationship of cigarettes and submarine sailors. But to men who rode those old scrap yard cheaters, those beloved stinking steel contraptions, there are wonderful memories associated with cups of joe, burning a butt and watching God secure His day with one of those magnificent sunsets. Memories of conversations about home, growing up, childhood sweethearts, sports events, leaving blood on playing field grass, transferred or lost shipmates, and mom's vegetable soup.

Any of you bastards remember when boats came with 'cigarette decks' aft of the bridge, shears and radar mast? You've got to be long in the tooth and drawing Polident and soft rations to remember cigarette decks. If you are old enough to have ventured topside at sundown to enjoy an 'after chow Camel and coffee', you probably have a dinged-up Zippo in a dark, forgotten desk drawer, that has visited a lot of seedy gin mills in faraway places you never mentioned to your dear mother and sweet old aunt Margaret. You can probably remember tossing a spent cigarette butt in the air and laughing at the seagull that grabbed it in mid-flight. You're also old enough to remember when the navy removed the deck guns, waved a magic wand and made gunner's mates into instant torpedomen, constipating the advancement process leading to a geriatric second class logjam.

You are old enough to remember late night stores loading, tender paint locker raids and sixty-five cent blind barber haircuts given by wardroom stewards for beer money. You remember hemp mooring lines and when the forward capstan was inappropriately called a 'niggerhead' (a practice long since properly discontinued to the credit of the person or persons who had the maturity and wisdom to shitcan the term). You remember when the closed chock aft that had the stern light mounted on it, was called the 'bull's ass' and officer's and chief's garrison caps were called 'piss cutters'. In short, you don't have to show I.D. to get a senior citizen discount.

Saltwater and a good smoke go together... Nothing better. Yep, thanks to chief Clear, I've quit the habit. My lungs still probably look like the inside of a locomotive firebox. But if tomorrow, my doctor told me I'd be turning in my earthly issue in six months, I'd head out, buy a carton of Marlboros, find a nice spot at the beach and watch the sun come up with a coffee and a smoke, cuss seagulls and shuffle through a seabag load of stories, lies and memories.

I would smile and restore my pride in having worn Dolphins and rubbed shoulders with the finest group of men I've ever known. A smokeboat Zippo is an Aladdin's lamp.

Going, Going, Damn Near Gone by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

If you rode smokeboats, go pour yourself a stiff one... This one will make you bleed in your sea boots.

Gentlemen, the places we knew and were a part of us, are slowly being removed. One by one, to be replaced by stuff with no history, no memories and no tradition... Just new stuff.

They did away with the escape tower at the Sub Base at New London. Funny thing though, it is still part of the base insignia. Kids today must look at their insignia and wonder why the damn thing has a grain silo on it. The damn place isn't even called 'New London' anymore... It's 'Groton'... Same place, same location. But like everything else in the boatservice, the idiot bastards changed it for some dumb reason known only to God and Rickover, the flag rank ferret.

Seven Brothers, once the official watering hole of the Atlantic Submarine Force... Gone.

The Basic Enlisted Submarine School, whose alumni turned the floor of the Pacific into a naval junkyard and the bluejackets of Hirohito's once powerful navy, into fast food for crabs. If any structure anywhere ever cried out for historic preservation, it was that building. It reeked of noble purpose... Now it's gone.

The Submarine Base at New London was once a beautiful place in a magnificent setting on par with an Ivy League campus or a mini-Naval Academy. It was a very impressive location, the center of the submarine universe.

Now the place looks like an industrial park full of look-alike sterile modern structures. Once again, a deprecating trade-off where small-bore leadership has traded the time-tested and meaningful for the fast pop expedient of accommodating immediate and often temporary need. The immediate need justifies the obliteration of the structures of historical value to those trying to reconnect with their time and place in the expanding timeline that is and always will be the United States Submarine Service... The Force.

Norfolk was my home port. During my tour C.E. (Convoy Escort) Piers became DES SUB (Destroyer and Submarine) Piers.

In 1960, the city fathers closed and destroyed the infamous East Main Street. We missed Sodom and Gomorrah and damn near missed East Main. Most of the vice and inappropriate conduct in the Western Hemisphere was invented on East Main. When East Main was in full swing, all the breweries on the east coast worked three shifts... It raised the standard for hell holes. If a bluejacket couldn't find it on East Main, it had to

involve gay penguins or nympho sea turtles. We must have been having too much fun, so they shut it down and leveled it.

What was left of the movable feast, hauled out to Hampton Boulevard.

Just outside the main N.O.B. Gate, there were two blocks that provided John Q. Bluejacket most of his transient pleasures... Wine, women and Slim Jims, Beer Nuts and hard-boiled eggs... Indigestion and athletes' foot of the esophagus. The place was so bad even the Shore Patrol thought nothing about taking a leak in the alley.

It was a mess, but it belonged to us... *The Big'O', Loveys Krazy Kat... The Victory... and Bells Bar and Naval tailors...* The recreation room of Subron Six... Home of Thelma, the queen of draft beer and unladylike conduct...

"I'll have the left nut of the sonuvabitch that tosses a quarter in that damn thing and plays *La Bamba, The Lonely Bull* or that gahdam, *Don't Take Your Guns To Town.*"

Well, you can still pee in the street because that's all that's left. The rest is gone... Gone to Honky Tonk Heaven.

They set fire to the Ocean View Amusement Park and flattened that... They demolished Camp Allen, the big brig... I don't think that'll upset a lot of folks.

The Hampton Roads Tunnel is free now... They either paid the damn thing off, or got sick and tired of sailors tossing peacoat buttons in the coin hoppers

I visited the place recently. The place is crawling with sandbagged machine gun emplacements and jarheads in camouflage uniforms, crouched down behind belted M-60 machine guns. It would not be smart to wrap a rag around your head and run down Hampton Boulevard yelling "Allah be praised!", unless you wanted to test your Blue Cross policy to see how good the bullet removal part holds up.

The Metric-Built Blonde and I dropped in to the Visitors' Center. You won't believe this, but honest-to-God, in a glass case on display they have a set of thirteen-button blues... The uniform we loved... The trou has the buttoned flap and the gussets in the back. I guess they have it there as a reminder of the good ol' days before they had to say, "Let the adventure begin." Back then, no Madison Avenue pencil neck had to tell us the adventure was beginning... A foot in your ass at Great Lakes served as the starting pistol.

Damn, it was weird to see that old set of blues behind glass... Poor lads of today, will never know the feeling of pride those wonderful outfits gave a true seagoing sonuvabitch.

But the saddest part was yet to come... Let me take you back to the previous day.

Before the Metric-Built Blonde and I left home, we received an e-mail from 'JDAWG' (John Cadell RMI(SS) Ret.). He gave us his phone number in Virginia Beach. When we arrived at the Oceanside Holiday Inn, John met us at the door. My dear wife is in awe of the generosity and hospitality she has had shown to her by submarine sailors she is meeting for the first time. John offered us the hospitality that has always been the hallmark of true submariners.

John returned and took us on a tour of the base. It looked a little different, but I could still find places I remembered. They renumbered the piers... That must be important, but for the life of me I can't figure out why.

So, we drove down to where Pier 22 was supposed to be. Since they changed all the pier numbers and bought up the old Fertilizer Piers, the whole base is contiguous... Meaning a drunk boat sailor can walk from where he's tied up, all the way down to Pier One, yell "AIRLANT SUCKS!!!", be chased home by some 5,000 aviation rates, and never leave the gate. In our day, we would had to have gotten into dress canvas or taken up a collection to send a telegram to AIRLANT's quarterdeck and signed it 'Chief Master-at-Arms, USS Orion (AS-18)'

We found the old Des Sub Piers entrance drive. In the late '50s, every totally inebriated submariner in Six, knew that no matter how loaded you were, if you crawled down the Des Sub Piers entrance Road, Pier 22 was at the end of it. If you were on your hands and knees and you failed to recognize that you had passed the dumpsters, the Orion's lower brow and our ASR the Kittiwake, you fell off into the Elisabeth River and recognized immediately that you had reached the end of Pier 22.

22 was not like the other piers. They appeared to be well regulated, neat and folks seemed to have established priorities and appeared to know what they were doing. 22 wasn't like that... The damn thing looked like Dodge City on Saturday night. Folks getting up posses to chase down fuel hose thieves... Master at Arms trying to convince those who weren't listening that ballcaps with seagull feathers stuck in the vent holes were not officially approved naval headgear... This was subsequently followed by an impromptu speech on how the term "get fucked, you idiot" and "get your ass outta the way" were not officially approved naval forms of addressing a Chief something-or-another's mate.

You spent most of your time stepping over loose crap all over the pier. Most of it not worth stealing... Some of it orphaned by boats that had shoved off two days ago. Stuff stolen from other piers that wouldn't fit into the boat full of thieves who made off with it. Supplies... Abandoned hawser... Big chunks of metal crap only God and the Orion machine shop knew what it was.

You could find sailors in paint spattered dungarees stretched out on top of a pile of supplies with a white hat over his face, dead to the world.

"Hey kid..."

"Stop kicking me, you gahdam idiot."

"WHAZATT?!?"

"Sorry, didn't see you Chief."

"What in the Hell's up with you? Somebody tell you to knock off for siesta?"

"No Chief... I have a narcolepsy authorization chit."

"A WHAT?"

"A narcolepsy chit, Chief."

"Is that some kind of secret submarine shit?"

"How would I know Chief, it's your damn Navy... You tell me, I'm a dumbass E-3."

"Well sailor, you do whatever the fellow who gave you that 'Whatever-in-the-hell it is' chit told you to do, when he handed the damn thing to you."

Yes sir, Pier 22 was the main street down the middle of diesel boat town. It had been washed by the tears of many departures. It had seen the last remains of boatsailors who died aboard ship or had been lost at sea and recovered, taken off boats in honor. It had felt the excitement of little feet racing to the arms of a returning dad... It had sensed the removal of panties and heard the snap of a pocket book clasp as they found a new home for the duration of a personally delivered 0200 *'Welcome back Jack'* to some poor bastard in the duty section.

Pier 22... By the time you read this, it too will be gone. Another victim of the wrecking ball that leads the march of progress.

"Robin, go tell the Merry Men some simple-minded idiot just burned down Sherwood Forest."

Standby for Heavy Rolls by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Anybody out there who doesn't remember those lovely words?

"Standby for heavy rolls... Secure all gear adrift."

Many of us wandering through life today, narrowly missed having death certificates, reading,

'CAUSE OF DEATH - GEAR ADRIFT'

For those of you who were smart enough to plan your life without spending a few years bouncing around in the North Atlantic, gear adrift is stuff not tied, bolted, welded, or otherwise firmly affixed to the ship so that it doesn't become airborne and fly around, severely upsetting the inhabitants.

"The Old Man is gonna bring her around... Sit this round-bottom bitch smack in the trough."

That translates into rolls that will knock your dental work in your colon.

Submarines aren't luxury liners... The bastards that designed the damn things didn't have crew comfort in mind. The level of interior comfort was on par with ancient primitive craft, except that no hairy bastard walked up and down with a bullwhip making you row the damn thing. Evolution had the hairy bastards wearing Chief's hats and going around saying stuff like,

"Jeezus Christ, you worthless collection of low-life, scum-sucking sonuvabitches! How'n hell can human beings become such pigs after three weeks underway?"

No, submarines weren't your most comfortable devices to transit the world's oceans in. But with incredible foresight and recognizing the inherent instability of a 'barrel-shaped' vessel, the designers put things called 'rolling chocks' down both sides of the underwater hull to act as vanes to retard rolls.

Ya, right.

Horseshit! The clown who came up with that piece of engineering brilliance, had never been north of Halifax in storm season. If you were to buy that idiot's reasoning, then glueing a couple of playing cards on the flanks of a bucking bronco should aerodynamically retard his vertical movement.

Like I said... Horseshit.

Back to 'gear adrift' in heavy seas.

Submarine sailors, the men 'who keep you safe when you sleep', store their accumulated crap anywhere they could cram it, poke it, stuff it, or jam it. Overhead ventilation lines were the all-time favorite locations.

Nothing is more lethal than overhead vent lines loaded with canisters of 16mm motion picture film... "Death by blunt instrument" comes to mind. It would have been difficult for the skipper to write,

"Dear Mrs. Jones, I regret to inform you that your son was killed by *Around The World in Eighty Days.*"

When movies began to fall out of the overhead, it was like being caught in a hailstorm of tractor parts.

As the hull twisted and torqued, sidelockers flew open, revealing hidden stashes of contraband or misappropriated stuff. Hidden skin book libraries. Hordes of smokes and stolen goodies... Things like piles of boxes of *Grape Nuts* and *Sugar Crisp*.

When we loaded stores, there was an advantage to being an animal in the loading party. I studied under the eminent box surgeon, Dr. Adrian Stuke. Dr. Stuke knew exactly where to make a rectangular cardboard incision to do a rapid *Grape Nuts* and *Sugar Crisp* ectomy... The removal of highly-prized underway trade goods. If you were in the line passing stores and the sonuvabitch handing you stuff passed you a box reading, 'Post assorted cereal in individual serving packs', and the words were upside down, you knew that there was a hole in the box and what had been behind that cut-out place was now in Doctor Stuke's foulweather jacket pocket. It was all part of the life of an E-3 bluejacket in the Submarine Squadron Six Jungle... Survival techniques of lads staying just ahead of Chief Petty Officers who dined regularly on large chunks of their asses.

In heavy seas, stuff appeared that had been reported as stolen ten years before...

"Hey here's a gahdam Zippo with 'FOR JIM - - ALL MY LOVE - - MARTHA'.

Anyone know Jim and Martha?"

"Nah. You think brother Jim might have been getting in Miss Martha's panties?"

"Could be, Horsefly."

"Hey... Martha might be his mom."

"Yeah, sure... Where'd you come from kid, the cabbage patch?"

It kept coming. You'd think you had a handle on it and something else would break loose and come waltzing down the passageway. Once the cooks were bringing up a box of frozen steaks that got away from them and came busting through the airlock door into the After Battery berthing compartment. That was like crawling into a giant washing machine in the middle of the rinse cycle with a loose Mack Truck engine.

I was always happy that I didn't have to live in an engineroom in heavy weather. Engineroom's had stuff roaming around in them that could take off an arm or leg, or pass directly through your head and remove the part of your brain you needed to get signed off on Trim and Drain.

I ran into a kid I graduated from high school with, at a reunion...

"Hey Dex, after I graduated, I went to Princeton and played Lacrosse. What'd you do?"

"Went to Snorkel U. and spent several years playing North Atlantic Skull Hockey."

"???"

Jeezus, you had to do it to know I'm not lying. Any man who never had a seat on the Icelandic Saltwater Roller Coaster... Who never tried to eat chow off a sliding plate or tried to pee into a urinal doing the mambo, will never understand. Anyone who did, is now turning to his wife and saying,

"Darling, this idiot bastard is not lying. I remember once..."

I remember once. They should carve that on every submarine sailor's tombstone.

Remembering Submarine Bars by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Submariners always stuck together. They worked and played as a crew and they gravitated to places where they could be with fellow submariners in locations where people who could tolerate the obnoxious conduct, impure verbiage and rollicking nonsense that was the standard by which smokeboat submariners were measured... Their hallmark, so to speak.

The submarine bar was unlike other naval watering holes and dens of iniquity inhabited by seagoing elements. It had to meet strict standards to be in compliance with the acceptable requirement for a boatsailor beer-swilling dump.

Loudmouth Barmaid.

The first and foremost requirement was a crusty old gal serving suds. She had to be able to wrestle King Kong to parade rest... Be able to balance a tray with one hand, knock bluejackets out of the way with the other hand and skillfully navigate through a roomful of milling around drunks. On slow nights, she had to be the kind of gal who would give you a back scratch with a fly swatter handle or put her foot on the table so you could admire her new ankle bracelet some ET brought her back on a Med run.

A good barmaid had to be able to whisper sweet nothings in your ear like,

"Sailor, your thirteen button flap is twelve buttons short of a green board."

And,

"Buy a pack of *Clorets* and chew up the whole thing before you get within heave range of any gal you ever want to see again."

And...

"Hey animals, I know we have a crowd tonight, but if any of you guys find the head facilities fully occupied and start pissing down the floor drain, you're gonna find yourself scrubbing the deck with your white hats!"

They had to be able to admire great tattoos, look at pictures of ugly bucktooth kids and smile... Be able to help haul drunks to cabs and comfort 19year-olds who had lost someone close to them.

They could look at your ship's identification shoulder tab and tell you the names of COBs back to the time you were a Cub Scout.

If you came in after a late night battery charge and fell asleep with a half eaten *Slim-Jim* in your hand, they tucked your peacoat around you... Put out the cigarette you left burning in the ashtray and replaced the warm draft you left sitting on the table with a cold one when you woke up... Why? Simply, because they were one of the few people on the face of the earth that knew what you did, and appreciated what you were doing.

And if you treated them like a decent human being and didn't drive'em nuts by playing songs they hated on the juke box... They would lean over the back of the booth and park their soft warm tits on your neck when they sat two *Rolling Rocks* in front of you.

Imported table wipe down guy and glass washer, trash dumper, deck swabber and paper towel replacement officer.

The guy had to have baggy tweed pants and a gold tooth... And a grin like a 1950 Buick... And a name like "Ramon", "Juan", "Pedro" or "Tico". He had to smoke unfiltered *Luckies*, *Camels* or *Ralieghs*. He wiped the tables down with a sour washrag that smelled like a skunk diaper and said,

"How are choo navee mans tonight?"

He was the indispensable man... The guy with credentials that allowed him to borrow *Slim-Jims*, *Beer Nuts* and pickled hard boiled eggs from other beer joints when they ran out where he worked.

The establishment itself.

The place had to have walls covered with ships plaques, many of which had made the trip up the river to the scrap yard, ten years before you enlisted... The walls had squadron pennants and a hundred or more old yellowed photographs of fellows named "Buster", "Chicago", "S-Boat Barney", "Chief Boiler Maker", "Malone", "Honshu Harry", Jackson, and Capt. Slade Cutter.

It had to have the obligatory *Michelob*, *Pabst Blue Ribbon* and "*Beer Nuts sold here*" neon signs... An eight-ball mystery beer tap handle and signs reading;

"Your mother does not work here so clean away your gahdam trash."

"Hands off the barmaid."

"Don't throw butts in urinal."

"Barmaid's word final in settling bets."

"Take your fights out in the alley."

"Owner reserves the right to waltz your worthless ass out to the sidewalk."

"Shipmates are responsible for riding herd on their boat's drunks."

Typical signage found in classy establishments catering to sophisticated clientele.

You had to have a juke box built along the lines of a Sherman tank loaded with Hank Williams, Mother Maybelle Carter, Johnny Horton, Johnny Cash and twenty other crooning goobers nobody ever heard of. The damn thing has to have "*La Bamba*", Herb Alpert's "*Lonely Bull*" and Johnny Cash's "*Don't take your guns to town*" in memory of Norfolk's barmaid goddess, Thelma. If Thelma is within a twelve-mile radius of where any of those three recordings can be found on a juke box, it is wise to have a stack of life insurance applications within reach of the coin slot.

The furniture in a real good submarine bar had to be made from coal mine shoring lumber and was not fully acceptable until it had 600 cigarette burns and your boat's hull numbers carved into it.

The bar had to have a brass foot rail and at least six *Slim-Jim* containers, an oversized glass cookie jar full of *Beer-Nuts*, a jar of pickled hard boiled eggs that could produce rectal gas emissions that could shut down a sorority party, and big glass containers full of something called pickled pigs feet and Polish sausage. Only drunk Chiefs and starving Ethiopians ate pickled pigs feet and unless the last three feet of your colon had been manufactured by Midas... You didn't want to get any where near the Polish napalm dogs.

No submariner's bar was complete without a couple of hundred faded boat pictures and a "Shut the hell, up" sign taped on the mirror behind the bar... And several rather tasteless nekkit lady pictures.

The pool table felt had to have at least three strategic rips as a result of drunken competitors... And balls that looked as if a gorilla baby had teethed on the sonuvabitches.

Submarine bars were home, but they were also establishments where 19 year-old kids received an education available nowhere else on earth. You learned how to "tell" and

"listen" to sea stories... You learned about sex at \$25.00 a lesson from professional ladies who taught you things your high school biology teacher didn't know were anatomically possible. You learned how to make a two cushion shot and how to toss down a beer and shot... Known as a "depth charge."

We were young... A helluva long way from home. We were pulling down slave wages for twenty-four hour a day, seven days a-week availability and loving the life we lived. We didn't know it at the time, but our association with the men we served with, forged us into the men we became.

And a lot of that association took place in submarine bars where we shared the stories accumulated in our up to then, short lives... We learned about women and that life could be tough on a gal.

While many of our classmates were attending college, we were getting an education slicing trough North Atlantic black water... Running deep and plowing holes below the surface and rubbing shoulders with some of the finest men we would ever know in bars our mothers wouldn't have approved of.

Bars that would live in our memories forever.

Signal Lights and Sailors by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Someone told me that Morse Code is a thing of the past in the armed forces and that global positioning satellites have done away with the need for Quartermasters. That all positioning is done by electronic technicians.

I don't think I would like today's submarine duty... You crawl into one of those big ugly looking iron monsters... Close the hatch and say 'goodbye' to daylight, sunrises and sunsets, being bounced around in heavy seas, listening to the code beeping away in the radio shack and not being able to see signal lights flashing back and forth at sea.

Signal lights and sailors... I never thought it would ever be otherwise.

You would be having a smoke and bullshitting with the manifold operators in control, when your duty Signalmen would haul out the light and head up to the conn. You'd crush out your smoke in the chart table butt kit and swing up the ladder behind the skivvy-waver.

"Bridge, conn... Permission for two men to lay topside."

"Conn, bridge... Who are they?"

"Billingsly and Armstrong... Billingsly is hauling the Lucy Light. Said he wants to see if we can gin up a movie swap with somebody tomorrow morning... Tells me it's the Old

Man's idea... Armstrong just wants to air armpits, catch a smoke and see what the world looks like."

"Permission granted for Billingsly. Tell Dex to bring three black and bitters up with him."

And so it went... The gentle slap of the signal light shutters opening and shutting. Take a second and close your eyes... Hear it? That distinctive popping sound as an intermittent finger of flashing light reached to the horizon. If you rode smokeboats you can remember the sound.

"What's he saying?"

"Sir, he reads as follows... USS Richfield, Capt. Roscoe sends his compliments... Requires charts for Panama approach due to revised OP Order. Can you furnish?"

"Whatcha want me to tell him?"

"Return compliments from USS Requin Capt. Edward Frothingham commanding. Then say, 'Wait one' while we check our charts."

It was sailor talk... Long range sailor-to-sailor bullshit. The Signalman's trick was to execute the official message then bullshit with the lad on the other ship. While officers were working out their officer stuff, the Signalmen would be bitching about what they just had for chow, telling each other what they would do for two pairs of clean socks or just cussing their present OP orders.

There was a very comfortable feeling you got standing on the bridge watching two guys connect your boat to the world... And all you heard was the gentle slapping of those shutters.

Knowing the nuke navy, it is all a lot quieter... Just some damn near silent dynathermal rizzofracting fizzmodulator cosmic wordsender that emits no sound above the decibel level of a ladybug fart and has a range of six thousand miles and thirty feet, with a ten-million word transmission taking just under one second, has replaced a really neat shipmate and his magic light.

One thing about the gahdam Rickover Navy... The sonuvabitches are always replacing real live American Buejackets with stuff you can't bum cigarettes off of.

Hey, you moonbeam propulsion guys... The sonuvabitch that swapped your signal light for whatever in the hell you got for it, didn't do you a favor... He picked your pocket when you weren't looking.

Bluejackets Trav'lin Light by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Nobody understands the term 'traveling light' like submarine sailors. Being assigned to an operating boat reduced the level on par with folks who lived in stick shacks up the Orinoco River. The Navy had this idea that an E-3 could survive owning no more personal stuff than you could compress into your mother's bread box. Guys who live in refrigerator crates under the bridge, control more stuff than boatsailors.

Remember when you left 'the Lakes' with your original issue? Damn seabag weighed ten pounds more than a railroad locomotive... Had one strap that you put over your shoulder so the uneven load could warp your spine. The combined weight of a wet peacoat and a 'fresh outta bootcamp' seabag could crush your ankles, snap your legs and drive your pelvis through your adenoids.

When you reported aboard you had dress blues, a Donald Duck flat hat, six raghats, four sets undress blues, four sets of whites, four belts... 2 blue and 2 white with Brasso'd buckles, regulation neckerchief rolled in prescribed manner, thirty-eight pairs of black socks, underwear, writing paper, manicure set (graduation gift), five-pound steam iron, five paperback skin books, a shaving kit stocked like your mother's medicine cabinet, and a pair of general purpose shoes.

When I left years later, everything I owned fit in half an AWOL bag. Six ratty T-shirts, 8 pairs of white socks, a set of seafarer blues with custom made zippered secret pocket in thirteen button flap, copy of *Playboy*, pipe with Sir Walter Raleigh pipe tobacco, two decks of worn out Bicycle cards, church key and keys on halyard clip, Zippo, three packs of sea stores smokes, girl friends photo, two pairs of Dolphins in Bull Durham bag, shaving kit (douche bag) containing toothbrush, Gillette safety razor, pack of Blue Blades, seaman's knife, pack of Trojans, half a bottle of Aqua-Velva, assorted change, and locker club key. This was a complete inventory of my earthly goods. I had tossed what was left of my issued gear on a messdeck table and told the crew to take anything they needed or wanted.

You didn't acquire a lot of stuff on E-3, sea and foreign duty pay... And submarine pay.

I have no idea what going to sea on submarines is like today. When you look at the size of the big iron monsters, I figure E-3s probably have their own private compartments with their own desk... Wardrobe closet... And can haul their own private home entertainment center to sea with them.

We used to homestead abandoned side lockers like western claim jumpers. Every now and then, the COB would step forward at morning quarters and yell,

"Okay ladies, LISTEN UP! I get the feeling that a few inequities in the distribution of After Battery real estate have crept into the 'Thou shall not hog sidelockers' creed of submariners. So, this is how it's gonna work. After I dismiss you, we are all going to

reassemble in the crew's hog wallow and open side lockers. Anyone not having a key, will get to watch his lock cut off with this pair of United States Navy 'handy dandy' bolt cutters. Any locker not claimed by a man present will become the immediate property of the lucky bag and containing gear adrift, which will be declared ships property... Any questions?"

"Yeah, Chief... I wanna lawyer."

"I wanna protest."

"I want my mother."

"What happened? You damn Chief's run outta clean socks?"

Then we would drop down below and it would begin.

"What have we here?"

(Note: 'What have we here' is Chief Petty Officer complete bullshit talk. The bastard knows full well that he has a fifth of Jim Beam in his hand... So what is all this 'What have we here?' bull crap?)

"Where did you naughty little lads find this jug of adult beverage?"

"Tooth Fairy."

"Naw, Chief, It was probably left there by some dead Chief... Some old worthless sonuvabitch that got pushed over the side one night for screwing with ship's company sidelockers."

"Nice try, Sweetcakes... I think it was something like a forgotten present for me. Consider this to be your thank-you note."

"Hope you choke on it."

"E-8s don't choke on whiskey, Sweetpea."

"What have we here? Appears to be a hidden stash of naughty books... Hmm-m-m-m... *Truckers Babe, Boarding School Nympho... Wanton Woman... Swamp Girl... Dr. Wons Deflowered Maidens... School for Sex...* Where do you children obtain such literary trash? This stuff will rot your brains."

"If that's so, you'd better check the wardroom because a lot of that so-called literature resulted from trade negotiations with the gentlemen up forward."

"In that case, let me refer to this as the new 'all hands' circulating library... Leave the lock off and thank you all for thoughtfully assembling this classic collection for the entire crew to enjoy."

"Chief... You trying to ruin the economy back here?"

"What have we here? Misappropriated ship's peanut butter... Vienna sausage... Crackers... Velveeta cheese... Sugar Crisp... Grape Nuts... Do we have some lowlife thieves racking out here?"

"No Chief... That's the loading party import tax deposit locker used to sustain the home for poor unwanted E-3s."

"Hey cookie... You need any of this stolen shit?"

"Naw, let'em have it. If they quit leaving cracker crumbs and stuff back all over the Alley's deck, the roaches will get anemic."

"And what do we have here?"

"Chief, we've been stealing all the Road Runner cartoons off all the sea print films. We have made that collection... Those five reels contain three and a half hours of continuous uninterrupted Wiley Coyote action... Possibly, what you hold in your hands is the single most valuable thing in the entire Submarine Force and Rickover doesn't even know it exists. You mess with that and it wouldn't surprise me, if on some dark night the Phantom or Zorro didn't pee in your seaboots."

And so it went... Like the Tax Assessor going through personal property down on skid row. We were the poor folk who owned nothing... Where the only currency worth a damn once you left the pier, were skin books and cigarettes.

We traveled so light, we left all the Jokers in decks of cards, in the pier dumpster.

Swinging The Hook in Strange Places by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Remember approaching your boat late at night in the launch making the rounds returning bluejackets to their ships? Remember the feeling of pride you had when the kid standing 'bow hook' lit up your hull numbers with his searchlight? Three great big white numbers on the side of your conning tower fairwater that was your address... Your portable address that you hauled all over the world.

Sure, we had one of those high North Atlantic sails... One of those fiberglass monsters held together with twenty seven zillion Monel metal bolts. If you matched the sail up

with the World War II fleet boat bow, the one with the hawser hole in the bullnose, you had the Requin. But there was something about that great big 481 that made you smile.

When the cox'n laid his launch alongside and you grabbed the hand hole above the limber hole and the topside watch gave you a hand to crawl aboard, you were home.

"Hey Dex... You find anything over there worth seeing?"

"Nah... Just hit a bar with Stuke and Bobby Ray, and ate something I bought off some guy selling weird food from a cart... Some kind of meat on a stick."

"Jeezus... You know what kinda meat?"

"Not really... Didn't taste bad."

"Hell Dex, you probably ate roasted cocker spaniel... I wouldn't eat anything some sonuvabitch was selling off a wagon in that roach-infested hellhole."

"If it tastes good, maybe it's better not to ask what it is... I was in line behind guys off the Cubera and the Grampus... They didn't fall over dead, so I figured it was okay"

"You're an idiot..."

Nobody ever listened to a topside watch.

Used to like to stand topside late at night, catch a smoke and watch the harbor lights. Watch the galley lights come on, on tramp steamers around 4 AM and harbor tugs and pilot ships head out to pick up incoming merchants standing in at first light.

One nice thing about life on the boats... If you couldn't sleep, you could always draw a couple of cups of coffee and crawl topside. There was always someone to talk to, have a coffee with and pass time with. My definitions of life's pleasant moments include late night conversations with topside watches, below decks watches, night bakers, insomniacs, and duty officers. I always liked late night aboard ship. It was the most personal part of being a sub sailor.

I also liked to listen to local radio in foreign ports. Couldn't understand a damn word... I would find some program that was predominantly music, punctuated with monkey jabber, or I would listen to the BBC World Service.

The problem with the damn BBC was the sonuvabitches broadcasted gahdam cricket matches. Cricket matches are as interesting as potato germination, bug sex and fermentation. I don't know how folks can get interested in that game.

In the early morning, all the ships in port raised their flags, each in keeping with their national custom. I always enjoyed that. I learned to recognize the flags of most maritime

nations while standing lookout and watching morning colors in foreign ports, as most of us did.

There was another thing about morning in a foreign port... For many of us, it was the first time we heard the distinctive sound that heavy anchor chain makes as it makes it's way up and rattles through a hawse pipe on it's way to the chain locker.

We all collected our special foreign harbor memories.

I remember this highly puffed-up government official who came aboard from a little poverty populated Central American country, whose national economy was based on the exportation of body lice and venereal disease. The little fellow had a great big hat and a whole lot of deferred dental work. The little toad was very impressed with his own importance. He had epaulets, pins, badges and a load of meaningless gedunk pinned all over himself.

In less than five minutes, the skipper, CDR Ed Frothingham taught him that if you did not wish to be verbally taken apart like a Swiss watch in front of a laughing bunch of American bluejackets, it would be advisable not to point your finger at a sub skipper and yell. At one point we thought Frothingham was going to grab the little bastard by the ankles, make a wish and rip the sonuvabitch in half. Everybody knew that the worst time to bug the skipper was in the middle of his third cup of coffee.

The one common denominator of foreign port was flies, big flies... Flies one step away from becoming birds.

One visit to Panama, me and John T. O'Neil went over the side to visit the local attractions... The part of town we visited had only two major attractions, open sores and body odor. We stopped at a street vendor selling barbecued monkey strips, a submarine sailor delicacy.

While John T. bought one and brushed the resident flies off it, I happened to glance up the street... A smiling, middle aged lady looking straight at me, hiked up her skirt, squatted down and took a whiz. While she was spattering her bare ankles and feet, she was brushing away flies. I looked at the flies all over the vendor cart and the pee running down the gutter, connected the dots and never bought anything from a vendor cart in a foreign country again.

Standing topside one night, gazing at the shore light of some country where the local citizens had been killing and eating each other thirty years prior to our arrival... The Skipper and his trusty old pipe joined me.

"Man, Captain... That sure is a festering boil on the backside of the goddess of human decency."

"Dex, don't judge countries by their seaports. Many seaports, especially in emerging nations, attract a seedy element..."

"Sir, the going rate to get laid over there is two cartons of Lucky Strikes."

"Son, you see, they've made great progress... In the old days, you could get yourself a woman for a pack of gum... By the way Dex, you gettin' anything on that thing but cricket scores?"

"No sir... Just those gahdam cricket scores."

One Man's Forever Heroes by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

They are shipping out by two's and three's damn near daily - My heroes... My forever heroes, the gallant fighting bluejackets of the World War II Submarine Force. The men who took the war to Hirohito's back door and put damn near his entire seagoing inventory on the ocean floor.

The men who took their boats to periscope depth and slapped a torpedo spread into a Jap ship right below the water line and then went to 400 feet and sat in the yellow glow of battle lanterns and listened to Nip depth charges blow away pieces of decking and line locker lids.

Men in hydraulic oil-stained raghats and acid-eaten dungarees, who sat in semi-darkness after the filaments of the incandescent lighting were gone and listened to detonating explosives, the tinkling glass of shattered gauge faces, busted crockery, and the sound of water coming through the hull penetrations with blown packing.

They didn't have to be there... Every damn one of them volunteered. In it's entire history, the United States Submarine Force never forced anyone to go to sea in submarines. Submarine duty has always been an honor reserved for men willing to serve and able to meet the challenge.

The World War II combat-hardened boatsailor was and remains today, a very special breed apart. He is a man owed a special debt by the beneficiaries of his courage, tenacity and willingness to risk all for the opportunity to tie knots in Jap monkey tails.

Due in large measure to the effort of those fine gentlemen qualified to wear the Submarine Combat Patrol Pin... And who once wore cloth Dolphins above their right cuff... You... Me... And all Americans and a boatload of other Pacific residents don't have to eat with gahdam chopsticks and eat carp eyeballs and rice.

Those men did more for submarine recruiting than all the posters and silver-tongued slippery slick recruiters all rolled up into one trick bag. Why? Because we wanted to be just like them. The closest we got was sleeping in their bunks and parking our butts on

the same padded potato lockers they sat on listening to the click of depth charge arming pistols.

They were the heroes of our daydreams... The leading men of our young adult fantasy aspirations. I read the paperback version of Theodore Roscoe's United States Submarine Operations of World War II behind a physics text in the 11th grade. The following year I was in sub school where one of my forever heroes planted his size 12 brogan in my butt on a regular basis.

I ended up wearing the silver Dolphins that made me a life-long member of a fraternity that allows me to leave beer glass rings on the same table as Arthur Gaines Smith and Ron 'Warshot' Smith... And be rewarded by their friendship.

I want to tell all of you World War II submariners how damn proud I am to wear the twin fish you... And you alone, put the meaning into and how proud and honored I am to be a part of the force you all belonged to.

I won't be able to tell when you start pulling liberty on the other side of the Pearly Gates, so I want to get it done now... And I know I speak for every boatsailor who walked in the giant footsteps you left for us.

Thank you gentlemen. We came later... We put your boats to bed... And we were honored to uphold the wonderful legacy you handed down to us.

Thank you... From a downline bluejacket who's highest aspiration in life was to throw his seabag aboard your boats.

Smokeboat Bluejackets by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

A lot of lads who rode or are presently riding nuke boats, tell me that there's not that much difference between nuke sailors today and the old smokeboat bluejackets.

That's like comparing thoroughbred racehorses with a broke down 40-dollar mule.

We had no 'blue' and 'gold' crew. No questions of accountability... No finger pointing. Anyone failing to properly maintain equipment was easy to spot on a diesel boat... There was never any confusion. The Chief of the Boat knew exactly which ass to plant his size twelve brogan in.

If the Communists had captured us and pounded bamboo splinters under our fingernails and set them on fire to get us to explain what a gahdam 'pooie suit' was, we would have been snorkeling in deep doo-doo.

Nobody got his Dolphins in the crew's mess. Smokeboat lads got theirs pinned on a soaking wet shirt aft of the sail, by the skipper in front of the entire crew. Prior to having

his Dolphins pinned on, the newly qualified man had been ceremoniously tossed over the side... Very close to the time sanitaries were blown.

In my day, no SUBRON SIX skipper pinned silver or gold fish, on a dry shirt.

So, in the ensuing years, the water must have gotten a helluva lot harder. The Navy has become a lot more sensitive to wet clothing colds, or the force gave up a sacred tradition and shitcanned something we all held close to our hearts. It surprises me that no maverick boat skipper with a set of adult cajones hasn't reclaimed this tradition... Even if the CNO requires that the ceremony take place at the base pool, with a lifeguard to baby-sit the whole thing.

I don't know if Dolphins pinned on a shirt soaked in chlorinated city-purified fresh water contain the same magic as our old 'twin fish' pinned on shirts soaked in Atlantic salt water, sanitary tank residue and 'Goddess of the Main Induction' pee, but it's gotta be better than handing them out in the crew's mess.

Next, you guys get all sorts of leave. We got four or five weeks a year and liberty within an allowable radius.

We spent a lot of time bouncing around on the surface getting the hell beat out of us... Freezing in the shears on lookout watch and having ice-cold air sucked through the boat every time the conn hatch was opened. When we were wallowing around in a state-five sea, we got to watch our food cha-cha around all over the place.

We didn't bang into a lot of stuff at sea... No fender-benders with other submersibles and merchant ships. We just went out, breathed a lot of foul air... Diesel fumes... Second-hand smoke... Punched invisible holes in the ocean... Got PDCs (practice depth charges) dumped on us and had our sleep interrupted by active sonar.

Nobody made any movies about Cold War service on diesel boats... No magazine pieces and no books. There was more attention paid to solid waste disposal, artificial cattle insemination and Swedish sex change procedures than America paid to her peacetime smokeboat riders.

A lot of our really great skippers, including my best one, were never considered for their fourth stripe because their Dolphins weren't radioactive. This was the saddest part of the whole stinking nuke vs. smokeboat business... That's the part I will never forget.

No, there were very few things that we had in common... Although, we should have. All this reconciliation stuff came later... It came when the fellows you never pulled liberty with... The fellows you never drank beer with... The fellows whose boats you never nested alongside of... Had grown old and fat. The nukes didn't have to share cabs with us or toss down suds with us at Bells.

I visited New London. To be honest, most of what this old diesel electric submariner would have had a nostalgic connection with, has been torn down and carted off to God knows where. The Rickovarian disciples have damn near completed our total ethnic cleansing.

They tore down a substantial brick building that was the 'Alma Mater' of successive generations of smokeboat qualified submariners, including the gallant submariners who covered themselves and the United States submarine force with honor and glory in the Pacific from 1941 to 1945. Nuke urban renewal is hell on smokeboat history.

“Dex, do you know what it would ‘ve cost to restore and maintain that old antiquated brick building? The Navy had to make a decision that balanced restoration cost, use of space and maintenance cost. When the figures were totaled, it was clear and simple... The building had to go.”

If the above makes a damn bit of sense to you, you’re either a nuke or nuts...or both.

I’ll save the Navy a helluva lot of money based on the same logic. Level the old buildings at the United States Naval Academy and put up modern glassed-in high-rise structures based on economical use of space. Be sure to slap the wrecking ball to the Naval Academy Chapel. Talk about waste of space, the entire lower level is devoted to housing a single individual... *The Tomb of John Paul Jones*.

Break up the 'Constitution' and sell her for apple crate wood. Hell, you could really save big bucks... Level the entire base at New London and teach Nuke School in a tent... Knock down Notre Dame Cathedral (there’s a helluva waste of space) and pop up a Taco Bell and a Burger King.

No, that damn near sacred part of our history was not nuke history so it meant nothing.

Submariners are a funny lot. They scrap the boats we love... Tear down our piers... Change the uniform and replace the life we knew... But we could always return to New London and visit the place where it all began. At least, we could until the Rickovarian handmaidens became the stewards of our historical memory. The mindless slaves of technology need a few lessons in the value of history and tradition and their collective asses paddled with their great big shoulder boards. I for one took my first steps on the road to manhood in the building the callous bastards turned into a load of salvage material.

There is an event called 'Return to Sub School'. Where would I go? Is there a pile of busted bricks somewhere that the smokeboat grads could go to, just to stand around and drain longneck bottles? Or do they just wander around the base pointing and asking each other,

"Didn't it used to be here?"

I don't know anything about nuke boats, nuke sailors, nuke traditions, or nuke leadership. I was never embraced by anything in the nuclear submarine force. No linehandlers on the pier when we layed alongside after midnight had 'SSN' stenciled on the back of their sea jackets... No smiling nuke night bakers brought hot sticky buns to me during a midwatch topside. Nothing good that came my way during my naval service resulted from anything done on my behalf by anything on the nookler navy side of my submersible family.

It was a time when smokeboat riders were the red-headed stepchildren of the sub force... Some sort of embarrassment... We were cattle fleas, riding beasts standing in line for the slaughterhouse.

Being a smokeboat bluejacket and knowing absolutely nothing about uranium-powered underwater craft, one thing has always amazed me. The submarine base in Connecticut was called SubBase New London in the old diesel boat days... The nukes picked up the entire base and moved it to Groton.

Amazing. But that's not all...

The most identifiable architectural structure was a 150-foot steel tower known as the 'escape tower'. It was used to train aspiring submariners in underwater submarine escape techniques... In practical terms, how to get out of a submarine bottomed out in 300 feet of water, or less. Meaning, that if you sunk next to the pier or somewhere between the pier and the Continental Shelf, this was your elevator out of there. Beyond the Continental Shelf, all submarine sailors knew that somewhere around 800 feet or so, you and the entire crew would be wearing your pressure hull like a peacoat.

The escape tower was such a dominating feature of the skyline across the Thames River from the United States Coast Guard Academy, that it was incorporated in the design of the Sub Base insignia... And remains so today.

The nukes figured out how to burn the sonuvabitch down. Quite an achievement, when you figure that the damn thing was a giant steel tank full of water... Something we idiot smokeboat sailors thought was damn near impossible. Nuke school students today probably look at the base insignia and figure it has a big grain silo on it... And probably think that beady-eyed Hyman financed the moonbeam navy with corn sales.

How'n the hell do you light off a giant steel tank containing tons of water?

Okay, you old smokeboat sailors fess up... How many of you took a pee in the escape tank on the 100-foot ascent? Don't make me go through the rest of my life thinking that I was the only one.

We were not *all* brothers... We should have been, but sadly we weren't. They quit making parts for the boats we rode... Quit making and carrying parts for our boats... That's the truth. We had to scavenge and salvage parts to keep our boats going to sea.

We leaked like hell at 400 feet. This is part of our history... The nukes got all of the attention, while we picked the carcasses of our dead sister boats just to stay in business.

The most obvious symbol that will last as the most enduring monument to the division between the nukes and smokeboat blue jackets is the 'DBF' pin. The forgotten lads of our peacetime, cold war diesel sub force... Who had silently endured the hardships of cramped service in outdated, neglected ships, finally faced the final insult... The awarding of the Nuclear Long Range Inconvenience Pin... A continuing unrecognized embarrassment and joke among wearers of the World War II Submarine Combat Patrol Pin and the wearers of the homemade, unauthorized, concocted diesel boat 'screw you' DBF pin. Nothing symbolizes the independent cocky natured pride we had like that goofy damn DBF pin.

It is funny though, when tanks replaced horsemen in the army they embraced each other... Prop pilots who shot the Nazi, Italian and Jap air forces out of the sky were considered good guys and heroes, and the lads who flew props in the Cold War were respected by the fellows who strapped their butts into mach-busting jets. But the slide rule navy took too long in embracing their smelly armpit brothers.

There is too much of our existence glossed over and forgotten. I write these stupid stories for my shipmates and the wonderful happy-go-lucky lads who rode the old worn-out diesel-powered submarines in the twilight of their existence.

I do get a little sick in the gut when a lad of the present generation of boatsailors, implies that it is every bit as rough today as it was when we singled up and took our old beat-to-hell boats to sea. I would never think of comparing the life aboard my Tench class boat to the difficulty and hardship aboard an 'R' or 'S' boat. Being in the downline evolutionary continuous chain, I know that I was the beneficiary of technological development made available by the tough life they lived. To tell those magnificent bastards that the life I lived was anywhere comparable to theirs, would be a cardinal sin, born of the arrogance of ignorance. For a nuke to say, "You don't know how tough we had it... It wasn't that different," appears to me an attempt to take away the centerpost of our pride in our service, *'the toleration of hardship'*.

It tells me that there is nothing taught about our service... Nobody remembers Task Group Alpha... The old SUBRONs Four, Six, Eight and Twelve... The Orion... Bells Bar. You can't contact the United States Naval Institute and buy a book about what we did, how we lived and what we were. These silly stories are an old man's attempt to celebrate those days... To wipe away the wrinkles from the long ago smiling faces... To let my mates fill their lungs with smokeboat exhaust and their hearts with the knowledge that as long as Dex Armstrong and my old shipmate, Mike 'Boy Throttleman' Hemming have access to pen and paper and Ray 'Olgoat' Stone provides the outhouse door to write on, the 'Cold War Smokeboat Bluejacket' lives on in our collective memories.

Gentle reconciliation has come, however belatedly, as a result of fine men such as Mike Hemming, Joe Roche, Roger Burleigh, John Clear, and Gary McLaughlin. Jim Christley, John Wynn and John Carcioppolo are the patron saints of the movement with Tommy Cox and Bobby Reed providing the musical accompaniment.

“Blessed are the Peacemakers.”

The Floating General Store by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Talk about a captive market. DesSub Piers had no supporting services. No ships service... No geedunk... No gas station... No theater... No laundry and dry cleaning facility. Outside of a couple of phone booths with no phone books and a pierhead parking lot the size of Kansas, we might as well have been living on an Indian reservation.

We smokeboat Indians were forced into trading with the Orion 'Frank and Jesse James' thief market... The Orion's ships service.

The damn thing was run by some first class storekeeper. I can't remember his name... That's just as well because I would need a lawyer after this. The sonuvabitch was put together when meat was cheap. I'll bet if you went back far enough in this bastard's lineage, you would find whores, pickpockets, flim-flam artists and at least one lowlife sonuvabitch who sold rot gut whiskey and rifles with bent firing pins to the Comanches.

This guy had no ethics... No shame, and no compassion. The bastard was the kind of guy who would drop kick a kitten to see if it really would land on its' feet.

A warning to any of you who have lived a misspent life... That fat bastard is going to be running the only general store in Hell when you get there.

He opened at 0800... He waddled in at 0745... I remember that he had a belt that was so big he must have swapped something to a hippo for it... And a brass halyard clip with a key to everything in North America on it. He would unlock this big-hinged metal plate... Swing it up and hook it to the overhead with a big screen door latch.

“Okay, okay... Who's first? The rest of you idiots get in line.”

“Who you calling idiot, you fat-ass tender oyster?”

(Note: Adrian Stuke and I were once riding a bus down some street in a weird part of Norfolk when we passed a seafood store. It had a sign in the front window of the store reading 'Tender Oysters... \$5.00 per...' Stuke yells,

“That's what those bastards on Orion are, tender oysters. They don't do a gahdam thing, so they must be tender oysters.”

Adrian never read Dale Carnegie's How to win friends and influence people but he did write How to get a Bar Fight Started in Five Minutes.)

There was always some two-week reservist who would stand in line for the better part of an hour for something stupid like a pack of gum.

“Sir, do you have Wrigley’s Spearmint?”

“Hey kid, don’t call that dumbass snake-oil trader, 'sir'. And second, didja ever chew gum ya bought on a tender? You gotta have teeth like a gravel crusher. Tender gum is 20 years old.”

“Yeah kid...I once got a pack the exec on this tub found in a mummy’s pocket... On the Requin, we take tender gum and drive it into the pressure hull with a nine pound sledge and hang our peacoats on them.”

“Knock it off... Son, don’t ever listen to an idiot off a submarine... Now, you want anything else?”

“No sir, just the gum.”

“Next...”

“Hey cheapass, you got any of those official SubRon Six Zingo lighters? The ones that the insignias fall off in a week? The ones that eat flints like a mechanical shark and that totally fall apart in a month?”

“What'd you expect for eight bucks?”

“I sure as hell don’t want to have the Japs get even for Nagasaki and Hiroshima one gahdam lighter at a time.”

“Mine works.”

“Yeah Horsefly, how many times have you had the sonuvabitch in the instrument shop to get the cover hinge fixed?”

“Here’s your lighter.”

“We’re making a 'Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea' run starting day after tomorrow... If this mini-mechanical marvel craps out before we’re making turns for home, the minute we shove our brow over, I’ll be up here to rearrange your facial features with a chipping hammer.”

“Next...”

“You got any Lincoln shoe polish?”

“Naw... Got Kiwi and Esquire.”

“Forget it.”

“Next...”

“Tenshun on Deck.”

“Morning sir.”

“Morning sir.”

“Morning sir.”

“How can I help you sir?”

“Got a Blitz cloth?”

“No sir.”

“Brasso?”

“Aye sir.”

(Note: The Army... Air Force... Marines all spend a major chunk of their enlisted life shining brass buttons, hat insignias, collar brass, shoulder brass, belt buckles, all kind of stuff. Bluejackets don't have any brass except belt buckles and our jumpers covered them. All our buttons were plastic... Including peacoat buttons. A little known naval trivia fact... Who had the world's largest collection of peacoat buttons? The Hampton Roads Bridge -Tunnel Authority... On Friday night and Sunday night, all cars hauling bluejackets tossed peacoat buttons in the toll hoppers. When the arm went up after registering payment of the toll, we tossed a peacoat button in the hopper as we rolled away.)

“Next?”

“Hey Horsefly, you got any writing paper with submarines or Dolphins on it?”

“Nope. 'Cause I never knew you submariners could write.”

“Smartass, how's your wife gonna like you with all your teeth punched into your colon? Now give me a box of damn writing paper.”

“Next...”

“Hey lardass, you got any aspirin?”

“Naw, they don’t allow us to carry medical items. They don’t want you bubblehead jerks self-diagnosing yourself... Go see your Corpsman or hit Sick Bay.”

“Thanks, Florence Nightingale.”

“Next...”

“Blimpman, have you got playing cards?”

“Yeah, how many decks you want?”

“Ten decks.”

“Ten decks?”

“Ten decks... Whazzit to you?”

“What kinda game takes ten decks?”

“It’s called 'Fleece The Tender Guys'.”

“Next...”

“Lighter fluid... Soap... You got Lucky Tiger?”

“Yeah... How many you want?”

“Two.”

“Five packs of Blue Blades... Tube of Ipana... Ace comb... Two Lifesavers.”

“What flavor?”

“Anything that will mask iguana butt breath...”

“Anything else?”

“Naw, but you can toss in anything you’re giving away free.”

The Orion’s ships service was the Hudson’s Bay trading franchise. It was like a dead elephant in East Africa... The place where all the animals, big and small came to feed and haul off what they needed to survive. It was where goofy bastards came to stand in line... Engage in inane bullshit... Rag Dumbo, the anchor-bound elephant... Restock their under way supplies... Exchange news with the lesser animals from other boats

and watch officers butt in line. It was the hollow log that the bugs crawled under to find stuff to haul back to their holes... The E-3s' Bloomingdale's.

Most of the crap sold there was made by the same sonuvabitches that brought the U.S. Navy, the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway.

It was our equivalent of the Avon Lady... Except that our 'Avon Lady' wasn't a lady... Was ugly... And appeared to be building his fortune by not buying razor blades and had to use a set of Toledo truck scales to check his personal tonnage. Every time the sonuvabitch went ashore, the Orion's draft decreased three feet.

The Orion's' ships service was our small town drugstore... The meeting place.

Smokeboat riders were a communal mob. In SubRon Six, our hull numbers were our small town mailbox numbers... The pier was Main Street... Orion was the center of town... All we needed was a Masonic Lodge, a Kiwanis Club and a park with a bandstand.

Someone sent me an e-mail telling me that SubRron Six still exists... I hope it is still the happy kingdom we knew.

One last memory concerning the ships service on 'Mother Onion'... Around 1960, our skipper decided that Requin needed a new ships insignia. Requin (SS-481) had undergone a conversion in the Charleston Yard and the radar picket insignia no longer made sense. Once a design was selected, we took the resulting image up to the ships service on Orion.

'Buffalo man' sent it off to the 'Land of the Rising Sun' and ten or fifteen kamikaze pilot widows produced 150 patches.

What we gave to the Orion's storekeeper was an anatomically accurate rendition of a very vicious looking man-eating shark... What we got back was a patch with what appeared to be a walrus with a dorsal fin and a Martha Rae mouth transplant... Science fiction fish.

It was all part of the diesel boat Camelot... Pier 22. When they tore our pier down, the trucks that carried away all the chunks of busted concrete, hauled away the last of our magic.

Observations of an After Battery Rat from The Sirago / Sea Leopard Reunion by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

We arrived at the Reunion. The Metric Built Blonde was navigating and giving me directions since I had the helm, couldn't fool with the map and Norfolk traffic is like a

Demolition Derby for employees at the Lighthouse for the Blind. By the time we reached the Holiday Inn, we had visited most of the neighborhoods in Norfolk and talked to most of it's citizens.

We arrived, parked, walked into the lobby and there was the registration desk... And what looked like a retired pirate's jamboree. While we were standing in line waiting to register, some fellow who looked like he might have been the result of an act of procreation between Blackbeard and Leona Hemlsey asked,

"Hey, anyone got a couple of Viagras? I just met a cute old woman in the bar."

What was funny was that we all had some.

At the registration desk I met Dave Glaser, one of the spark plugs of the reunion. Dave comes with a smile that looks like someone transplanted a Steinway Grand Piano keyboard in the grill of a '49 Buick... A smile like that classic painting 'The Laughing Cavalier'. You know that line in *Ghost Riders in The Sky*, 'Tryin' to catch the Devils herd'? Dave would have caught the sonuvabitches, loaded them on buses and made them behave. For four days, Dave herded a herd of worn-out smokeboat senior citizens through his and Mike Bikel's wonderfully choreographed magic sheep dip maze like the ringmaster of a Chinese circus.

It was great.

There were so many old barnacle-encrusted Chiefs there that on day two, they held a Leftover Chiefs yard sale.

The first event we attended was something called 'The Duck-in on the beach'. Being a diesel boat sailor, I naturally figured it would be something held in a gas station parking lot where you could duck in, meet folks and grab a couple of Miller Lites iced down and snorkeling around in a couple of galvanized garbage cans.

Was I surprised to find out that the Duck Inn was a beachfront restaurant on par with the Grand Ballroom at the Newport Yacht club... With the longest ten-switchback handicap ramp in North America. The actual ramp is 2 ½ miles long with two rest stops. While we were there, some old grinning Sea Leopard coot came up and asked,

"Hey Dex, you get the crabs?"

"Here? You got crabs HERE?"

"No, not those... The crab cakes, you idiot!"

I went up and got some... Great stuff. Everything was first rate. It was so nice, women went to the ladies room and shaved their legs.

I had two rum and cokes in memory of days long ago. The folks at the bar only use Coca-Cola for coloring.

The next day we hung around the hospitality room, telling lies, drinking Miller Lite and meeting absolutely wonderful people.

That night we were loaded on the bus by the trail boss, Dave Glaser, for the scheduled dinner cruise. Old Dave and Ringmaster Mike didn't lay on some old antiquated shot to hell 'Fly-by-the-night Bus Company' being kept alive by artificial means, bus... No sir, we got one of those giant bend-in-the-middle, with opera house over upholstered seats and ceiling mounted TV sets. I had never been on a bus with TV sets... I figured that forward of the bend in the bus must be wardroom, so I moved aft of 'Bended Knee' and sat with Glenn Herold and Ed Brooks, in Enlisted Indian Territory.

That was when we heard Joe Roche complaining about no stewardess, no bar, no observation deck, no strolling musicians.

"What the Hell is this? I was promised a massage and Champagne!"

His lovely bride jerked his choke chain and made him sit down.

For those of you who have not had the absolutely delightful privilege of meeting Elsie Roche, you've missed one of life's truly great experiences. Elsie Roche is the 'lovely lady' complete package. She comes with a radiant smile that could light a ballpark. Joe sure got a wonderful prize in his marital Crackerjack box.

The cruise ship was great... Food was excellent... One of the hallmarks of this reunion was the quality of the food. Every meal was great.

The first thing Roche, an ex-engineer room inmate said was,

"Wow! What a neat invention! A ship you can see out of."

After dinner, we retired to the fantail to suck down diesel smoke and watch passing landmarks.

We passed DesSub Piers. The destroyer tenders Shenandoah and Grand Canyon were gone... The Fletcher Class cans were gone... The Orion is sitting up in the Rustbucket Boneyard rotting... All the smokeboats are at best, memorial boats... At worst, flying aboriginal flags and loaded with weird talking monkeys who pray to a painted stick... Or became simply Gillette Blue Blades years ago.

There is no Pier 22 anymore. They have replaced it with a double deck contraption... The Magic Kingdom is gone. The double-deck Pier allows Joe Nuke to transit from his shipover pay Mercedes-Benz to the brow of his moonbeam whizbanger without the

inconvenience of noisy raindrop pitter-patter on his headgear. Ain't modern technology grand?

Thanks to this innovative technologically-driven Naval architectural marvel, the filet mignon wagon can drive right up to the robot stores loading conveyor belt and be met by LT. Polyester, the Supply Officer in high collar whites, who no longer has to worry about high-altitude-delivered seagull crap.

Speaking of seagulls, I saw the great, great grandson of the gull who crapped on the piping of my brand new sharkskin dress blues in 1959. His great, great grandson was strutting around the parking lot with the seagull accurate crap delivery 'E' painted on the underside of his right wing. The boat just went on past the location of old Pier 22. Joe Roche couldn't recognize anything.

"Hell, Dex, I was in the engineroom... Everything looks the same in there."

Joe wanted them to tie up so he could go up and place flowers at the statue of the 'Lone Barmaid' but the cruise ship can't do that. So instead, we held a prayer meeting there in the presence of true diesel smoke and put in a request to the Goddess of the Main Induction for the return of 25 cent draft beer, five cent 'Slim Jims' and barmaids with loose panty elastic.

When the boat tied up several old coots noticed a nearby 'Hooters'. Dave Glaser nailed them with his Marlin Perkins 'Wild Kingdom' tranquilizer dart gun and Mike Bikel dragged them to the bus.

We returned to the Holiday Inn and sat in the hospitality room drinking beer, exchanging chunks of little known submarine history, smoking cigars and staying up way the hell past our bedtimes.

The next day there was combination pig roast and Sirago / Sea Leopard softball game.

Mike Bikel selected a site that was a cross between 'Old McDonald's Farm' and a children's petting zoo. Mike broke one of the cardinal rules of smokeboat sailing ... 'Never let Enginemen and Machinist Mates get anywhere near farm animals.'

First, several of them started winking at the chickens... Then they started chasing a turkey and writing love letters to a cow.

They cooked up a drawing for the Kentucky Derby. Glenn Herold sold me a ticket that read 'Domestic Disturbance'. At first, I thought it was a Chinese fortune cookie prediction but found out it was a horse that could have stood a chance without the hoof amputation. Glenn Herold is a Derby pickpocket. He sold one guy a ticket on a bronze horse General Grant is sitting on in a park in New York.

I have no idea who or what won the Derby, but the pork barbeque was great.

I have no idea who won the softball game... But that night at the banquet, I sure wished I owned a whole lot of stock in Ben Gay because you smelled it everywhere.

You heard a lot of frequently repeated phrases like,

" I only wear them for reading."

"Going to get my hemorrhoids worked on in June."

"Mary snores like a Santa-Fe locomotive."

"I must get up to pee ten or fifteen times a night."

"Gonna start getting social security in September."

And, "My prostate's the size of a truck tire."

The last and most magical time for me was the Banquet. The food was outstanding once again. The door prizes were great. The whole thing was first rate.

Some fellow who works for Prudential Insurance made a very motivational speech about a Med run, where he saw a Russian smokeboat and later had an Ukrainian (I think) exchange student, whose old man rode Red Navy smoke boats Then, he had a part about the U-505, a German U-Boat on display in Chicago. At intervals, he held up a photo of a Guppy conversion and we yelled "DBF!" in accordance with his initial instructions.

I was asked to follow him and make a few remarks. I'm not a polished public speaker, but was kindly received. Those moments standing there and being accepted as what I am so damn proud to be... A Diesel Boat Sailor... Having my credentials revalidated by men I totally respect... Was one of the greatest moments of my life. A major stop on my 'After Battery' magic carpet ride.

In closing, I would like to thank Glenn Herold who presented me with a fantastic carved likeness of an American Bluejacket imposed over a perfectly made ship's wheel, that was hand carved by Ed Brooks, a true master of the art of woodcarving. That work of art now hangs on our dining room wall. I am deeply grateful, and Solveig and I treasure the friendship we have formed with Ed Brooks and Glenn Herold. Solveig is having the cruise ship photo of the three of them (Solveig, Glenn and Ed) professionally matted and framed for her dresser along with Adrian Stuke, who watches her put on her nightie every night.

Life appears to have treated us well... The lads who once tore holes in the North Atlantic, have done okay. We sure talked a lot of truly wonderful ladies into marrying us.

From the look of things, no SubRon Six breast-fed baby went to bed hungry. The combined bust displacement of the ladies present appeared to be in the 25 to 27 ton range and in many instances registered max load bra cup recordings.

White hair has become general issue.

The generosity level remains as high as it always was.

And Mike Bikel and Dave Glaser can hit the rack tonight in full recognition of a job well done and enjoy the feeling of deep gratitude, felt by each and every one in attendance.

Especially Dex and Solveig.

Trying to sleep in the Alley by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There was, the captain's stateroom at the high end of the personal comfort scale as applied to smokeboat duty, and at the low end of the spectrum you had 'Hogan's Alley'.

I have no idea what life was like lying flat on your back in the Old Man's rack. All I know is, that after his stewards secured the officers pantry and crawled up in the bridal suite under the torpedo loading hatch in the forward room, his coffee source shifted aft. All the Old Man had to do was make a sound-powered phone call to the crews mess and get an E-3 to jackass a cup up to his stateroom.

Most of the time when the crew's mess phone made the '*Wh-i-i-i-rp, Wh-i-i-i-rp*' sound, it was some sonuvabitch from the engine room or back in maneuvering, asking,

"Hey Dex... You guys got any more of that cake we had at evening chow?"

Or...

"Hey Dex... I'll kiss your ass, if you'll get someone comin' aft to haul back two black and bitters back here."

Or...

"Hey Dex... What're you bastards putting out for mid-rats?"

So, during the late-night hours, phone discipline went to hell.

'Wh-i-i-i-rp, Wh-i-i-i-rp'

"Rat Johnson's sanitary tank cafe..."

"Who am I talking to?"

"Depends... Who'n the hell are you?"

"The Captain."

"Er... Sir... I REALLY apologize... I wasn't expecting you to be calling."

"Obviously. What is your name?"

"Armstrong sir... The duty idiot."

"Armstrong, bring me a black and bitter and tell the diving officer to run with a three down and to pass that instruction to his relief."

"Aye, sir."

That night, I got the lecture on inappropriate skylarking. The skipper was not a fan of what he called 'uncalled for stupid shenanigans or idiot behavior'.

Every time there was a weird prank pulled off on Requin, Stuke and I always got a personal invitation to the 'Inappropriate Shenanigan Muster'.

"Gentlemen, were you two involved in this dumbass nonsense?"

"No sir..."

"Very well, return to your duties."

Then, there were some nights when he asked,

"Gentlemen, were either of you responsible for tonight's stupidity?"

"Sir, do we need legal representation?"

"Dammit, how many times do I have to tell you two clowns that a United States warship is no place to act like college freshmen?"

"Sir, we didn't initiate this nonsense or have anything to do with Mr. so-in-so's loaded cigars. Our involvement was confined to the rubber rat in the covered dish."

But this thing started out to be about sleeping in the alley.

The best rack in the entire Navy was the middle rack outboard in the after end of Hogan's Alley. Why? Well, with the medical locker being located in the after end, it formed a little dark cubby hole where you could stick your head... Kinda like having privacy for everything above your dogtag chain. If anybody had the slightest inclination toward claustrophobia, this was not the rack for them. For folks who wanted a little post

embalming fluid preview of what it was going to feel like spending eternity in a satin-lined box, this rack was the ticket.

Another benefit to this 'head sanctuary', was that Doc held his daily 'sick, lame and lazy' muster in the Hogan's Alley passageway. It was bad enough having to listen to the daily litany of physical complaint, without having the added visual benefit of having to watch Doc treat abnormalities of the tallywhacker at eye-nose level or lance butt boils six inches from your nasal passages.

"Doc, I've got this chronic itch, can you help me out?"

"Doc, I think I may have contracted a case of the mechanized dandruff."

"Doc, you got anything for sonar shack hemorrhoids?"

You spend a couple of years in the Alley next to the medical locker and you could qualify for a general practice at any hospital in Zambia.

The Alley's after bulkhead that Doc's magical 'cure for damn near everything' locker was bolted to, was a CRES sheetmetal partition. The damn thing was so thin, you could hear all the conversational exchange between guys using the sinks, urinals or showers.

"Hey Bill, you going to Philly when we get in?"

"Not until those guys up on Orion tell me if they can fix number one scope."

"In that case, I'll probably take Trailways."

The After Battery head was like 'the meeting place'. The 'at sea' information exchange location.

"Man, the racket of those rudder rams whacking into and out of the 'stops' is driving me nuts."

"Why'n the hell did you move to the after room?"

"Got my own bunk back there."

"Hey Jack... Who was that goodlookin' gal you had out at Ocean View?"

"Dixie's sister."

"I didn't know she had a sister."

"There's a helluva lot of stuff you probably don't know, horsefly."

And so it went... You could rack out in the after end of Hogan's Alley and listen to the head conversation and piece together a pretty accurate picture of 'on board' happenings.

There were sounds that became familiar to the lads who stowed their gear in the 'After Battery Crew's Zoo'.

There was engine vibration. To a smokeboat sailor, silence was an alien concept. On the surface, you got engine vibration and engine racket whenever some jaybird opened the forward engine room watertight door. In winter, we would get authorization to leave the forward engine room door 'on the latch' (open), so that we could become the beneficiaries of the warmth generated by the rock-crushers back there.

The entire advantage of this ambient heat could be cancelled out by some sonuvabitch opening the conning tower hatch, allowing igloo air to turn the place into something resembling a Butterball frozen turkey locker.

"Somebody slap some iron in that pneumonia hole!"

Then, there was the incessant grabass in the chow line. The cooks could only feed twenty men (absolute max) at a single setting. The remaining animals used to line up in the after battery for'n aft passageway and engage in all manner of inconsiderate grabass and clutch butt.

What you had was a line of supposedly mature individuals, punching and poking each other, sticking wet fingers in each other's ears and yelling "Rape!". Telling each other how socially unacceptable they smelled, making all sorts of bodily-generated sounds, singing, dancing, hooting, hollering, and imitating jackasses.

Every now and then, the lead element would open the airlock door and start yelling,

"Hey Peto, you one-way sonuvabitch... That's the third gahdam load of mashed potatoes you've parked on your plate. Give your shipmates a gahdam break, you inconsiderate bastard."

"Hey Rat... No dessert for Harry. He didn't eat any of his liver."

"Hey Rat... Stuke's putting fresh rolls in his pocket."

It went on and on... Grown men totally devoid of social grace or considerate behavior.

Then, you had animals searching for either 'right' or 'left' footwear in the glow of redlight, when riding the surface in moderate to heavy seas. Shoes and boots migrated around the After Battery like stray cattle. There is something in North Atlantic rolls that causes adrift boots to cha-cha off in different directions. I have seen men hunt for the better part of an hour for a left brogan using a Zippo for illumination.

You had ballast tanks surrounding the After Battery. When they opened the vents hydraulically, you could hear the damn things slam open... We called it 'roof racket'... The topside walking deck was affectionately known as 'the roof'.

The vents would open and if you had an outboard rack, you could hear the water rush in as 311 feet of steel monster slipped beneath the waves. After the old girl settled at her designated depth, air trapped in strange places would gurgle up in the tanks.

'Bloop... Blooble, bloop, booble, booble, gurgle, bloop, bloop.'

It always reminded me of the sounds emanating from an old coot's stomach following Thanksgiving dinner.

And there were times when the old gal blew her packing and the Atlantic Ocean came calling. Water came in, in submarine terms, 'like a cow pissing on a flat rock'. If saltwater got into our battery well, things could get serious in a hurry. Salt water and sulphuric acid create chlorine gas. Chlorine gas in appreciable quantities is a 'turn your toenails blue' showstopper. You smell chlorine gas in a submarine and an undertaker will be the guy who will be emptying your pockets... Or when the hardhat divers come down and beat on your hatch, they will find 'Nobody Home'.

The After Battery was home. No one ever confused the place with 4-star accommodations in the Swiss Alps... Very few people truly knew what life was like there. Bums who lived in a cardboard box in a drainage culvert probably knew better than anybody. The actual residents wore twin silver fish over their pockets and stayed in touch with other former residents of the neighborhood all their lives.

You see, the worthless, good for nothing, inconsiderate, unsalvageable sonuvabitches had once been fellow snorkellers in the submersible septic tanks of the North Atlantic, and indivisibly bound by the Goddess of the Main Induction's lip lock.

You remember that 'Rock-a-bye Baby' song your mother sung to you while you were still in three-cornered pants? Well the closest I ever came to being rocked to sleep after age four, was lying flat on my back in an Alley rack with heavy seas running. The ship rocked and rolled... Rolling back and forth with fore and aft bucking bronco action. You would gently roll back and forth and slide up and down in your rack. I loved the motion and could fall off to sleep in no time.

In real heavy seas, a round-bottomed diesel submarine rolled like a mad wild woman. The bad thing about living in the outboard middle rack in the Alley was having to listen to guys work their way back to the head to shoot their cookies... In a state-five sea, the interior compartment air carried the faint hint of vomit to add to the devil's mix that passes for breathable air in the world of the diesel boat submariner.

Then there were the balmy nights of surface cruising. Nights when you crawled into your rack in a sweat soaked dungaree shirt with the four engines on line sucking fresh

air through the boat and you drifted off to sleep listening to the ever-present bullshit conversation in the Crew's Mess.

Someone once said that to a submariner, total contentment was defined as 'the opportunity to lie in a bunk riding surfaced in the wake of a carrier, reading a spicy skin book and scratching your athletes foot on your bunk chain'. I ask you, did it ever get any better than that?

There was a fellow listed on the 'Watch, Quarters and Station' bill as the 'below decks watch'. He roamed from 'stem to stern' checking gauges, bilge levels, level of sanitary tank contents, valve settings, sweating packing glands, and waking up the oncoming watch.

Waking the watch on a smokeboat was an exercise in lion taming.

"Hey... It's time to get ready to go on watch... Rise and shine, morning glory... You awake? Gahdammit, don't make me have to come back and whack hell out of you with this flashlight."

"You even touch me with that flashlight and some guy will be blowing taps over whatever is left of you, you simple-minded sonuvabitch."

There was one clown in underway section three who was hell to wake up until we broke the code. He was a big fellow and his bare feet stuck out under his bunk chain. So, when the below decks watch entered the After Battery with his ongoing watch list, he visited this clown first and stuck a lit Marlboro between his toes. Within a week, all you had to do was touch this guy's toe and he would pop out of his rack like he was shot out of a toaster.

When I left the Navy, I missed living in the Alley. I missed guys stepping all over me, crawling into an upper bunk. I missed guys yelling,

"Knock off the bullshit and let a working sailor get some sleep!"

I missed twenty guys snoring like some kind of walrus convention. I missed the wonderful smells of the night baker. I missed the North Atlantic wintertime coughing. I missed all the cursing when they blew #2 sanitary and vented her inboard. I missed all the chow line bullshit. I missed the farting contests and one-upsmanship. I missed guys rooting around in sidelockers looking for smokes.

What I truly missed was my home. The After Battery was a great place to be, if you were nineteen... Not attached to anything or anybody, except twenty snoring sonuvabitches who would gladly share all their worldly possessions with you to include their last Lucky Strike.

The bunks were hard... And when you tried to peel your sweaty back off a naugahide flash pad, you felt like a human postage stamp. The place smelled like a YMCA locker room in Pakistan. At sea, the place looked like grenades had been tossed in. By the time you had formed a loving relationship with a pin-up gal or Playboy centerfold, some Annapolis graduate would make you remove and dispose of it.

Janet Pilgrim was taped to the inside of an After Battery head stall door. I proposed to her three times on one northern run.

The After Battery was home. In port, somebody always left the light on for me. The Alley was the one place I have lived in my life where I know I truly belonged. It was like that nursery rhyme where the old lady had all those kids and lived in a shoe.

Fresh Air, Hot Coffee and Salt Spray

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Running 'full on four' with a stiff breeze coming fore to aft and salt foam drifting off the tops of the rising and falling swells... Toss in a cup of strong 'bottom of the pot' coffee and no more than two, steady course contacts... That's the closest a lot of us are going to get to Heaven.

A fleetboat bow... The World War II, pre-cosmetic surgery configuration, was the best. It sliced through the sea like a surgeon's scalpel and turned the divided water into symmetrical wings that slid aft, mounted the tank tops, ripped through the limber hole openings, and worked it's way aft to cascade out of the superstructure and return to the sea.

You stood there in the shears in your trusty, beat up foulweather jacket and trusty raggedy-ass watchcap, surveying God's great ocean for fellow traveling mariners on our shared nautical highway.

The sea never remained the same. Sometimes she was as soft as a lullaby and at other times she engaged you in the Devil's Flamenco Dance. The unpredictable nature of the surface of the North Atlantic was part of the magic of being a diesel boat bluejacket.

Nowhere on earth do human beings experience season changes like the seagoing lads of the North Atlantic. I am sure that the same thing applies to the north and extreme lower latitudes of the Pacific. I never visited either place, so my knowledge of a crocodile's digestive tract and conditions in the Pacific Ocean are exactly the same... Never took a personal tour of either one.

When you say something about conditions riding smokeboats north of Cape May, there is always some old gray-haired, west coast thirty-year plus career bluejacket, who pipes up with,

"Hell, you shoulda' been with us on the old USS Crawdad when we rode out that typhoon off Bonga-Wanga. Now, that wuzza storm. We lost both bowplanes, our complete walking deck, the starboard screw guard and most of bow buoyancy."

Then some jaybird will chirp up with,

"Hell, that wuz nuthin'. In '56, we hit wind so bad it blew us back to the same pier we left three days before... Wind wuz so damn hard, it blew off the conning tower and we conned the boat by signal flags from the O.D. peeping out from the bear trap, giving course corrections to a signalman lashed to the J.T. soundhead, to relay to a messcook poking his head up from the after room hatch who hollered down and someone wrote a note for the below decks watch to take to the maneuvering room... Or to the fifteen guys working the rudder rams."

Guys on the West Coast lie a lot. The gentlemen who rode the East Coast smoke belching iron sewer pipes, were known far and wide for nothing but honest, non-inflated historically accurate and totally factual reporting of all events.

Naval historians used to visit Bell's to verify facts and get accurate first hand accounts of many naval events. Thelma once told me that the lads wore out so many New Testaments swearing to the accuracy of verbal accounts, that they started spray painting out-of-date Norfolk phone books black and stenciling 'HOLY BOOK' on the cover. That is why the part of the bar that contained no jars of pickled pig's feet, Slim Jims, pickled hard boiled eggs or packs of 'Beer Nuts', was known as the 'Altar of Accuracy'.

The best times were the balmy summer days. The days when the corpsman made you cover your nose with zinc oxide and the O.D. let you wear the aviator glasses you traded your electrician's knife for.

On days like that, the rhythmic rise and fall of the boat and squawk of the gulls looking for fish cut up by your screws to surface in your wake, made it as good as it ever got. On those days, the Richard Rogers' theme from *Victory At Sea* kept being replayed in your head... *'Dah, dah dee dah dah... No Other Love Have I'*. I can't remember it ever getting any better than that.

"Mr. So-In-So..."

"Yes?"

"I've got a contact bearing... Two... Five... Zero... That's 250 degrees. I would say she's a fully loaded tanker... Hull low in the water. She's opening... She's making turns to get somewhere in one helluva hurry."

"Very well... Report any and all changes in course or speed."

"Aye, sir."

"By the way..."

"Sir?"

"Where did you pick up the shades?"

"Airdale swap."

"Now, are we missing anything critical?"

"How critical is an electrician's knife?"

"Very well, we'll survive... I was worried about the Wardroom silver."

They were lighthearted times. Time spent with men whose faded names you would find in your family address book fifty years later... With a chronological daisy chain of all the locations where they could be found at any given moment the ensuing years.

You got sunburned together. Froze your butts off together. Bounced around in the shears as a duo. Bummed smokes off each other, laughed at each others rank amateur attempts to sew up ripped and acid eaten dungarees. If your running mate was married, you could always count on a free home-cooked meal for taking care of the 'first night alongside' family grocery list. Hey, that was part of the cement that held shipmates together.

You drank cheap wine in places where you couldn't make out the local gibberish.

It didn't matter, because no nineteen-year-old not raised in the Waldorf Astoria or related to the Rockefellers, knew what the hell decent wine tasted like. All we knew about wine was without a proper tool, it was damn near impossible to get the cork out of. But, if you could remember to stick a 4-inch bolt in your jumper pocket, you could drive the cork down inside the jug by using the bolt and the heel of a removed shoe, and drink it that way. This would account for the small chunks of cork you could see floating in liberty launch pier vomit.

Oh yes, the second thing we learned. Cheap wine can louse up a set of whites faster than swimming in ink.

And the saltwater rose and fell on your tank tops as the bow cut an invisible furrow across the roof of the Goddess of the Main Induction's ocean kingdom. The O.D. mindlessly wiped the TBT lens with his shirtsleeve, and the guy who would be your best friend for life would tap you on the shoulder and say,

"Dex, I've got one crossing aft... Slow bastard... Must be turning no more than six knots."

And the relieving watch would start making their way topside... You could hear the boots and the endless bullshit conversation, common in the raghat trade.

Soon you and Stuke would be elbowing your way into a place at an after battery mess table and chowing down on that damn great meatloaf you'd been smelling wafting up from the open conn hatch for the better part of an hour.

"Mr. So-In-So... Permission to lay below before my starving shipmates wipe out the meatloaf."

"Permission granted."

And we racked up another day at the office... In Arleigh Burke's Underwater Snoop Corporation.

Running Mates by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

There were special shipmates known as 'running mates'. Running mates were the lads you pulled liberty with... The guys who were tighter than Siamese twins... A submariner's running mate was second to a bride when it came to close relationships.

He hauled your drunken worthless, good-fer-nuthin butt back to the pier... He checked on you in sick bay... He picked up your laundry when you were on leave... Provided sexual services to your barmaid girlfriend when the Exec sent you to Advanced Undersea Weapons School or the Navy jerked out your appendix. In short, if you fell over the side in feeding frenzy, shark infested waters, the sonuvabitch would have been thirty yards on the other side of your limber holes before the lookout shouted, "MAN OVERBOARD, PORT SIDE!".

You shared money, your beer, your clothing, smokes... Liberty secrets... You name it.

I once saw a guy coming down the sidewalk up on Hampton Boulevard... Up near the main base gate... The area known as the 'NOB (Naval Operating Base) Gate One corner'... It was where Mr. Devil ran all his earthy franchises.

This sailor comes tooling along and notices several members of his crew being loaded in a shore patrol wagon after some fisticuff activity in some gin mill.

"Hey, you guys got L.C. Maxwell in there?"

"Yeah, I'm in here... Who'n the hell wants to know?"

"Me... Dusty."

"Hey Dusty, you missed a good one... I put some First Class Electrician's lights out."

(Note: The Navy didn't have any of that "You have the right to remain silent... Or anything you say can and will be used against you" bullshit... Why? Because it is damn near impossible to shut up a drunken submariner. With a good load on, a boatsailor will admit to damn near anything... Train robberies that took place fifty years before the sonuvabitch was born... The Chicago fire... The sinking of the Titanic and blowing up the Maine... Volcanic eruptions... Lack of rain in Arizona... Stuff no sober sonuvabitch would believe. Submariner resumes were mostly a litany of misdeeds. It was not unusual to see some guy on the pier and have a shipmate say, "You see that big ape... Engineman off the Carp... Saw the sonuvabitch clean out an entire bar in Montevideo.")

Where in the hell was I? Oh yeah...

"L.C., you in there?"

"Yeah, I'm in here."

"It's me... Dusty."

You can't let a running mate go to the pokey without company.

"Hey you dumb, shore duty sheriff posse, stupid sonuvabitches... You titless, sugar plum fairies got a seat in there for a real honest-to-god seagoing sailor?"

Calling a shore patrol a titless sugar plum fairy would get you a seat in the First Class section of any Navy paddy wagon ever operated anywhere in the free world.

That's what true running mates did. Nobody had to tell you, it was something boatsailors did instinctively for running mates. You never abandoned, let down or forgot your running mate. If God paired you up with a good running mate, you've never lost contact... Your entire life.

I drew a rascal named Adrian Stuke... One of the greatest gifts I was ever given and Adrian gave my wife and I Janie, and they never made a better lady than Janie. Adrian led me into temptation and out the other side... Through the valley of the shadow of Captains Mast... And taught me to tapdance in non-regulation gumbo and survive. At our first Requin reunion, his first inquiry to our skippers was,

"Sirs, Has the Statute of Limitations run out on willful destruction of Navy gear and light-fingering stuff off Orion?"

Running mates... One of the reasons you never forgot them was their stenciled name and serial number kept turning up on stuff in your skivvie drawer four or five years after you cleared the RECSTA with your freshly typed DD-214.

The American Bluejacket's White Hat by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The old trusty raghat was the worldwide symbol of what we were. It was the hallmark of the cocky, lighthearted American bluejacket... The good guys of the sea... Slayers of iron monsters and evil naval power dragons. The men who poured forth from naval warships flying the internationally recognized symbol of freedom to ratchet up the pace of life in sleepy seaports.

The telltale symbol of the American sailor was the hat. It was traditionally worn in a variety of ways... Over one eye... Parked above the bridge of the nose... Cocked to one side or worn perched on the back of the head. This total lack of uniformity was taken by the navy's appointed nannies, the United States Marine Corps, as a nose-thumbing gesture directed at good order, discipline and the foundations of civilized society. The United States Marine Corps has difficulty understanding that there are men in our armed forces who are not totally enamored with dressing up like an organ grinder monkey, marching in step and singing a hymn about spending eternity pulling some kind of watch on the streets of paradise.

His 'screw it all' attitude is the hallmark of American sailors... Or let's say, "It used to be".

So do yourself a favor... Rent the video *Sand Pebbles* with Steve McQueen or *The Last Detail* with Jack Nicholson and take a good look at the way an American white hat should be worn... Better yet, watch the entire *Victory At Sea* series and look at the way the greatest generation wore their hats. Let's call it 'war-winner' style. What idiot jaybird came up with that toilet hopper look of the present day white hat? You know the one... The perfectly round bidet bowl with the rolled lip? It looks stupid... Looks like someone threaded his head and screwed a porcelain birdbath on the bastard.

The Navy's elite honor guard looks silly with their perfectly symmetrical tankless toilet hats. Honor Guards are mostly composed of shore duty ballet-trained show ponies. They wear braided tassels on their shoulders that represent nothing but the fact that they have learned dance step routines and rifle tricks like baton twirlers... It doesn't have a damn thing to do with seagoing sailing. They are certainly not a model for emulation by saltwater bluejackets.

Who was responsible for this travesty, this senseless dickering with one of the finest national symbols of a justifiable proud naval force? When is naval leadership going to quite monkeying in the world of silly fashion statement and get the hell back to saltwater sailing?

It is an unfortunate fact that the decisions involving the raghats uniform and the imposition of unwanted unnecessary change are officers, who never wore the white hat long enough to form the affection for it that we did... And lace pantied fashion designers whose only connection with sea service or the military is hawking senseless unnecessary change at the expense of tradition founded in blood sacrifice. This shipmates, is a crying bloody shame, a sad commentary on present day leadership who spend one helluva lot of their time wondering about morale.

If some ranking admiral with influence and a set of deepwater cajones, would send out a directive to the effect that the days of Betty Crocker bowl bluejacket headgear had come to 'all stop' and that the naval establishment would be returning to the World War II winner look, he would become an overnight hero.

Mr. Admiral, sir... Do it soon... Authorize wings in the hats again... Not only authorize it, gahdammit, encourage it... It would be a very meaningful gift to your sailors.

At some point this spring around Memorial Day, the nation is scheduled to dedicate the World War II Memorial. The United States Naval Ceremonial Guard will be present at many of the festivities. Make them look like real sailors and not like clueless, fresh out of boot camp shore duty jaybirds.

I have been to a number of ceremonial functions where these hybrid almost weird folks appear... They look like choreographed circus ponies wearing those silly, stupid looking ceramic spittoon bonnets.

Always some old barnacle encrusted veteran seadog whispers under his breath,

"What in the hell is that, and where in God's name did they come up with those gahdam clown hats?"

Admiral, allow sailors the freedom to imitate and follow the traditions of previous generations of sailors. We're not Grenadier guards, Rockettes, the Copenhagen Ballet... We're sailors... United States Navy.

I'll bet that every time Admiral Arleigh Burke looks down from his cloud conning bridge in Paradise and gets a load of those baptismal font hats, he damn near launches his lunch.

The powers that be in our naval hierarchy, have had to cut down, reduce and eliminate much of what was once the heart and core of our naval establishment. Parts and components that once had 'Made in the USA' stamped all over them are no longer available within the continental limits of the USA. We have become very 'overseas' dependent. At one point, we were informed that the Army's fashion statement desk-bound fashion generals had decided to put the entire Army in black beanies made in Red China... Red China, the outfit that poured over the Yalu River and slaughtered Americans... The folks who supplied our enemies weapons in the Viet-Nam War... The

folks that still supply our enemies weapons, medium and long range missiles, intelligence and sophisticated training... If the short memory monkeys who force uniform change had had their way, our entire Army would be sporting black beanies made by Communist slave labor... Beat that.

Force manpower levels require the extortion payment of recruitment, reenlistment and specialty retention bribes that amount to tens of thousands of dollars. Sad, when you think that all the bastards promised us, was tough training, rough duty and the opportunity to earn Dolphins, if we could measure up... If we were good enough... Man enough. Nobody tucked any wampum in our jumper pockets or kissed us in the vicinity of our bellbottom gussets.

Give'em back their white hats with the wings... Return to the days when the fleet turned a blind eye to the eccentricities of individual expression... The days when our sailors were the happy-go-lucky lads of a single naval force. When raghats worn at cocky angles told the less fortunate of the planet that the rollicking American bluejackets had dropped anchor or put their lines over... And, that the sealanes of the world were safe and secure. They were kept so, by those wonderful men who wore their headgear with a decided list and sporting wings.

And remember, use the *Victory at Sea* series as a guide if your tour in the navy began in the era of our bidet bonnet navy. Give'em back the cocky 'go to hell' raghat and become a hero to every raghat whoever pissed against the wind in service to the greatest naval power that ever was.

Telling Time by Progressive Putrification

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Things that deteriorate, do it in some sort of sequential progression. In other words there are recognizable phases, in the standardized table of steadily increasing degree of rottenness.

Stuff going bad was a way to tell time aboard submarines. First thing to go was bread. Mold can begin to grow on bread the first time the conning tower hatch slams shut and someone yells,

"Green board!"

New guys get concerned over bread mold... Old guys just eat the damn stuff because someone tells you it won't kill you or effect your sex life. Cooks make great French toast out of stale bread. Bread was always the first thing to go... It was the parade leader of stores going bad.

Cockroaches must love bread. On every smokeboat I ever rode, roaches had set up housekeeping in the bread locker. The old joke went,

"If you got a slice of raisin bread and you didn't like raisin bread, all you had to do was shake it and all the raisins would get up and run away."

Also, you always knocked on the door of the bread locker before you opened it. This courtesy allowed the roaches time to run and hide. Light hurt the little begger's eyes.

Next, milk clabbered. When milk goes bad, you hope your nose picks up the scent before a mouthful gags you. Once one goes bad, you shoot the remaining load out the garbage gun in short order. Bad milk smells like the breath of a Pakistani opera singer.

The Navy experimented with frozen canned stuff called Sealtest Frozen Reconstituted Milk, in 1960. You mixed the contents of a can with the distilled water from the ships potable water system. Diesel boat potable water damn near always had hydraulic oil floating in it (The reason boatsailors got fitted for kidney oil filters). We all got used to oil slicks in our coffee, but rainbows in your milk were a totally unacceptable ball game.

Once the milk turned bad we went over to drinking 'bug juice' and 'panther piss'. Bug juice was purple (grape flavor) and panther piss was orange for orange flavor. We mixed the damn stuff with distilled seawater to drink with our meals. It wasn't half-bad. It would make a better tale to say it was really lousy, but it wasn't.

When the milk clabbered, we used 'armored heifer' in our coffee... Canned milk... Carnation milk... You remember,

Carnation milk The best in the land

Comes to your house in A little red can

No tits to pull No hay to pitch

Just poke a hole In the sonuvabitch

Next came black bananas and gray furry oranges. Ah yes... Mid rats green furry baloney. For those of you who never pulled an 8-12 watch at sea on a fleet submarine, there are culinary delights served to the 'on-coming' and 'off-going' watch-standers known as midnight rations or simply 'mid rats'.

Mid rats are tidbits similar to what inmates in a Karachi POW camp get, or what little nekkit savages who live in the upper reaches of the Orinoco River eat when they can't get owl guts and fire ants. Stale bread, navy 'self-healing vulcanized-scab' mayonnaise and green furry baloney that has undergone a hasty surgical green fur removal.

There is also something called hard salami or in the totally tasteless lexicon of the American submariner, simply known as 'horse cock'. Hard salami came bound in twine with a loop at the end. This loop allowed the salami to be looped over the end of an

overhead operating vent handle. In heavy seas the four or five salamis suspended in such fashion, would swing back and forth.

For people with a propensity toward seasickness, several salamis doing the pendulum action slow doo-dah from an overhead vent-operating handle can cause the reappearance of stomach contents... Politely referred to by boatsailors, as 'shooting one's cookies'.

Oranges shriveled and grew gray fuzz... Potatoes got black spots. You learned to cut away rot and use the good parts. It was a life lesson for lads who had grown to adulthood in the most blessed land on earth, lads who had grown to adulthood eating only cosmetically perfect vegetables and not eating with utensils that had been dropped on the deck. After a year on the boats, every boatsailor would think nothing about eating an apple found in a deadman's pocket.

We learned lessons in making do with what we had. We learned that in life it is perfectly okay to cut away the spoiled spots and eat what's left. We ate stuff we would not have hesitated to have 'deep-sixed' a year before.

Take mites and weevils. The little bastards turned up in the dry stores after five or six weeks out. When you were a new guy, eating cereal with tiny bugs hopping around in it was disgusting and unacceptable... Bordering on totally nasty. Within a year, mites doing acrobatic tricks in your Post Toasties was just added entertainment... Live 'snap, crackle and pop'... A little animated floor show with your breakfast... A circus where you ate the tiny performers.

Smokeboat sailors ate bugs and assorted little critters and didn't think a helluva lot about it. It was just another part of the life of diesel boat sailing.

Nukes probably have compartments that contain grazing farm animals... Dairy herds... Entire grocery stores... They get McDonalds' air drops... French chefs too, probably. Hell, the damn things are the size of heavy cruisers. It's a lot like going to sea with the Princess Cruise Lines.

We had laughing unshaven, tattooed cooks... Galley magicians in dirty aprons who fed us like kings. I would be an ungrateful liar if I failed to say... Never ate better in my life. I don't give a damn if we pulled bags of potatoes out of our 'secured for sea' shower stalls, with two feet of white roots growing out of all sides of the bag... I don't care if the cook then zipped the lid out of a can of 'mystery meat' and a can of corn... The cooks could throw together a great meal, damn near every time. I think a lot of boatsailors would agree that we ate better than any other service element.

That's what they did. They worked magic.

But the main difference was that in the smokeboat navy, our calendar was based on a table of progressive putrefaction and deterioration in days when the standard medium

of exchange was stale sea stores cigarettes and skin books... And if you were lucky, you got a two-minute shower every seventeen days.

When your Timex broke, the lid to your Zippo fell off and your AWOL bag zipper wouldn't work anymore, then your enlistment was up.

My Idea of a Sub School Graduation Talk

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I recently attended a Basic Enlisted Submarine School graduation. Like everything else in both life and our military forces today, all the presentations and graduation speeches were temperate, colorless, gentle admonitions to go forth and do good stuff... Keep your fly zipped and don't piss on the petunias.

I sat there and mentally composed what I would have said to these fine young men poised on the threshold of the finest experience of their lives. John Kill asked me to put into words what I felt being a submariner was all about from a raghat point of view.

A Submarine School graduation talk should ignite a raging fire in a young man's heart.

"Gentlemen, you represent the top 2% of The United States Navy and to be here with your butts planted in folding steel chairs in this magic carpet ride launching pad, you had to volunteer not once, but twice. Once to join the finest navy that there ever was or ever will be and next, to sign up for one of the most respected fraternal organizations in the history of naval warfare - The United States Submarine Service.

"The course completion certificate you will be given here today will serve as your adoption papers in a family that will embrace you for a lifetime and define you as a citizen of this fair republic who earned his rights by unselfish arduous service in a universally recognized tough, elite outfit. A man... A very wise man, once told me to look on the back of my Dolphins...

"Dex, you see an expiration date on your Dolphins?"

"No, sure don't."

"You know why?"

"Don't have a clue."

"Because you are just as much a member of this community today as you were the day they pinned those Dolphins on your wet dungaree shirt."

"Think about that a second... Let that sink in. The United States Submarine Force is a commitment you have made voluntarily, and have proven, through rigorous selection

and the successful completion of this course, worthy of acceptance in an organization of special men having lifetime benefits.

"You are the latest, bright, shiny link in a continuous chain of American Submariners who have established a worldwide, fully justified reputation as the world's toughest saltwater meateaters riding the finest steel sharks ever made.

"You stand on the threshold of an adventure... An unparalleled magic carpet ride that will exceed anything you can conjure up in your finest fantasy. What you are about to embark on, is a trip that would make Jules' Verne's eyes pop out. I envy you. I am so damn jealous of your youthful enthusiasm, your evident pride in your accomplishment and the amazing journey you begin here today.

"Ah, the yellow brick road.

"Fathers will point you out in bus stations...

"Son, you see that sailor over there?"

"Yessir."

"He's a submarine sailor. He rides submarines."

"He rides submarines. Can you think of a prouder title? I saw a little kid riding a tricycle on the sidewalk in Groton. The kid was wearing a T-shirt that read, *'My dad is a submariner'*. I can only think of one kid's T-shirt that would top that... *'My dad checks Meg Ryan for ticks.'*

"Your voluntary selection of the Sub Force as your way to serve your nation has given you access to the seaports of the globe and a life where you will be able to fit all your worldly possessions in a seabag.

"You will go places in the oceans of the globe where damn few men have ever been... Where you will hear sounds and experience sensations known only to a minute fraction of the world's population.

"You will serve in the most advanced technical submersible platforms known to man. Craft that serve as the farthest extended invisible bulwark of American defense.

"You will go from here to earn your Dolphins, representing your qualification and acceptance as a United States Submariner.

"I have previously mentioned how I envy you. I have had my opportunity to dance the saltwater fandango with the Goddess of the Main Induction. I have experienced the camaraderie that you will soon experience. I have heard the creak and groan of steel at depth, but nowhere near the depths the modern marvels you will ride, will achieve.

"You have opened the magic oyster that will change your life forever and that will serve as your ticket to adventure. You have achieved a status that will provide the only credentials required to sit at tables covered with beer glass rings and swap bullshit and sea stories with your undersea fraternity brothers while the sailors not associated with the life below sunshine penetration look on in wonder and envy.

"And, you will be forever embraced by the elite Sub Force family up to the point that the Great Commander issues you your pine peacoat and assigns you to a boat moored at the Big Silver Pier in the Sky.

"A hand salute to the mothers who bore you. The parents who put the steel of honor and conviction in your spine and the patriotic values in your hearts. You are, by the road you have chosen to travel, a credit to, not only your family, hometown, state and nation but to yourselves.

"Let me assure you that your name will be listed alongside the best of the best. It will appear on a list containing both long ago legends and giants of the force and the names of the pioneers of nuclear propulsion. Lads, that is a damn fine group of men to be associated with.

"In conclusion, as you sit here today, there are lads in your hometown whose greatest thrill in life will be making a three cushion shot at the local pool hall. They will never travel more than 300 miles from the hospital where they were they were born and end up marrying some sweetheart whose ambition will begin and end with accumulating grocery store discount coupons and attending PTA spaghetti dinners.

"The closest those jaybirds will get to exotic faraway lands will be thumbing through the pages of a barbershop National Geographic.

"While your uncle Ralph is back home guarding his hen house with a rusty 20-gauge, you will be cruising the seas of the planet, hauling ordinance capable of causing urban renewal with a 500-mile radius. You will be standing watch over weapons, capable of sending entire populations off to Hell in a firey flash.

"The American submariner is the principle reason the bad guys rarely get to peek under Lady Liberty's nightie and your kids don't eat sushi at school.

"You have joined the family of America's undersea warriors.

"Tomorrow when you shave, take a good look in the mirror, smile and say to yourself...

"Mothers, lock up your daughters, there's a new boatsailor in town."

"WELCOME ABOARD, SAILOR."

Cinematic Sub Stuff by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The German film "DAS BOOT" (The Boat) is the only film that closely approximates the boatservice I knew. Hollywood films never showed stores crammed everywhere, dirty laundry, skin books tucked above ventilation lines, gear adrift, piles of 'one-way' trash... And folks in raggedy ass dungarees.

What they did show were officers wearing dress uniform hats in the barrel (conning tower). To get their eye up flush with the rubber eye piece on the periscope, the officer's hat had to be turned around backward with the visor to the rear. Anyone ever see that? I never did. Anybody ever see a dirty cup in a submarine movie? How bout a full butt kit? A lookout wearing a straw hat? A messcook in an apron that looked like it was salvaged from a leper colony dumpster?

How come the boats commanded by Cary Grant, John Wayne, Ronald Reagan, Clark Gable, Burt Lancaster, and Tyrone Power all operated using convent language? How come all the raghats went to fancy nightclubs full of knockout twenty-year-old blondes who drank Manhattans and danced to Glen Miller tunes in designer dresses? Where were all the hairy-lipped honeys that hung around the zoo cage bars we frequented?

How come all the boats returned freshly painted and the happy non rated guys all went bopping across the brow in fresh starched whites to be met by twenty wholesome bobby-soxers named Linda Lee and Peggy Sue?

Where were those admirals in dress canvas standing on the pier waiting to congratulate the old man when we came in?

How come the piers are all spotless and taxicabs are lined up to take all the squeaky clean Arthur Murray qualified liberty hounds to the Copacabana? How come no returning bluejacket ever meets some homely chick with six runny nose kids... A head full of curlers, worn out sandals and hands her a thirty pound sack of filthy dungarees?

How come you never see some jerk hauling ass to get radio traffic and guard mail? Where do they hide the tenders with the rust stains? Speaking of rust, how come when highly paid Hollywood guys turn up on a pier, oxidation stops?

How come none of the returning drunks ever look like Ray Stone and Doc Beeghly? No missing clothing, blood, lipstick or leg chains.

How bout the nicknames on those Hollywood fleetboats? "Rusty", "Big Mike", "Billy", or "Smiling Eddy"? You never see anyone called "Butt Face", "Fat Ass", "Fungus Foot" or "Garbage Gut"... We had a kid nicknamed, "The Chinese Whore". We spent half an evening at a boat reunion trying to remember the kid's real name.

Who loads torpedoes and store on those cinematic wonders? The Good Fairy? Shoemaker's elves? The entire tender crew out of the goodness of their brown bagger hearts? The National Conclave of the Little Sisters' of the Poor?

There is always a scene where Mr. Admiral Warmhart has Captain Cleanliving in his office.

The admiral speaks...

"Jack, I've got to give you a rough one this time."

"Bingo Lizard Straits?"

"You guessed it Jack... Bingo Lizard Straits. Word has it that there are three carriers, seven heavy cruisers, five lights, twenty-seven destroyers, nine motor torpedo boats, a paddle wheel tour boat and a geedunk truck in there. "

"Should be able to line up a target or two, admiral."

"That's the spirit Jack. I knew you would say that."

"We'll make you proud admiral."

"I know you will. By the way, the entire crew of the tender, Damage Control School, base sick bay, base galley staff, barbers and command staff have volunteered to stay aboard tonight and help your E-3s load torpedoes, stores, sea print films and trading material to use for barter with aboriginal simple people... and people in France... and paint the entire boat. By the way Jack, how are Alice and the boys?"

"Well Admiral, she was so despondent after the last assignment you gave us on the USS Happyfish, that she drowned Billy and little Teddy and shot herself."

"Hmmm, sorry to hear about that. Doris wanted to get her pineapple upside-down cake recipe."

Who writes the dialog for those gahdam things? Better yet, who does the Navy give them for 'technical advice'... Mary Poppins?

I don't know a damn thing about nukes. I figure all the movies made about them are the gospel truth. John Wynn told me, "Nukes never lie".

The Last Smokeboat Cattle Drive by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Author's note: This one is dedicated to LCDR. Bruce Miller, USN, who actually wanted it written. LCDR. Miller is a submarine officer devoid of any taste in literature, who pulled the wings off of insects as a child. This one's for you Bruce.



There are folks still living who were involved in this adolescent bullshit so like they said in the old radio days, 'The names have been changed', not to protect the innocent, but to keep old shipmates from showing up to set my house on fire and members of our wardroom joining the witness protection program.

Riding submarines can present you with long stretches of near catatonic boredom. At such times you can actually hear hair follicle growth and spider web construction racket. Submarine duty... peacetime submarine duty, has a lot in common with mushroom farming and nose hair cultivation... punctuated with Wardroom activated acrobatic evolutions and Rin-Tin-Tin drills... Naval justified saltwater tag and stick fetching.

On Requin, we non rated animals filled these relatively inactive times with correspondence course work, pornographic literature study and plotting very complicated leg pulling stunts, (some of the gags aboard the old 481 took days to cook up or incubate).

All of the commissioners of stupidity racked in the After Battery with the Grand High Wizards living in the alley. Adrian Stuke was our resident prime minister and 'Pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey' primary consultant.

We had a new cook report aboard. He was a lifer. A first class with ten pounds worth of hash marks and the attitude of one who was comfortable and relaxed in the company of Kings, Vice Admirals and personal friends of folks running around in the New Testament.

He was supposed to be God's gift to cooking stuff. How did we know? The sonuvabitch told us every ten minutes. According to him, we were the luckiest bastards in the entire Atlantic Fleet.

He was full of himself, to understate it. We later found out that he had a right to be because the ego maniac bastard could very well have been the best gahdam cook in the Navy... both coasts.

But that is beside the point and screws up the sea story.

The 481 chapter of the *National Association of Submersible Alley Rats* met in closed sessions to discuss what could be done to ratchet the new cooks ass down to a level where we could converse with him. After several days we came up with a multi-stage plan to 'take the starch' out of his skivvies.

The Snorkel Brick Plot

The bastard was a senior baker. He had been the numero uno 'go to' baker for Wardroom party delicacies on a heavy cruiser. Again, we knew all this because he did everything short of tattooing the information on our ass.

One night, we had been out several weeks and had run out of commercial bakery bread. (You always knew that when morning chow was French toast, the bread stores had played out, because the cooks could use stale bread to make French toast.)

So God's gift to deep-sea cookery announces that he would be baking bread that night.

We conferred with the Diving Officer and he began taking induction air for two mains through the snorkel. As Mr. Wonder Baker shoved two trays of his magical bread into the oven, we pulled the plug... dived the boat, and shut down two mains on a vacuum that would suck the crystal out of a Rolex.

We ran with the vacuum until it was time for the bread to come out of the oven.

The animals had slowly drifted into the crew's mess. Out came two trays of black as ink, charred bread. Bread won't rise in a vacuum... Poppin' Fresh Physics 101.

"Hey... they eat crap like that on surface ships?"

"Whaddaya call that kind of bread, Mr. Kitchen Magician?"

He never knew what hit him.

"Must have something to do with these gahdam submarines."

"Must have something to do with a bullshit artist who can't bake bread worth a damn."

Knife Edge Mattress Cake

One night the poor sonuvabitch shoved two trays of coconut sheet cake in the oven.

Once the cook had his two trays securely in the oven, closed the oven door and adjusted his cooking control to the proper temperature, the Leading Seaman cranked up the ten pound blower and put a 14° list on the boat. We were using hoes to get that green ballast tank grass off the tanks. (We used file-sharpened hoes. When using hoes, the topside gang called themselves 'Hoers', i.e. topside whores.)

It doesn't take a whole helluvalot of imagination to picture what a 14° list will do to a sheet cake.

When the cook pulled out his trays, one side looked like a Serta Perfect Sleeper mattress and the other side looked like a Gillette Blue Blade.

"Hey Betty Crocker, how do they divide those surface craft wedge cakes? They use some kind of logarithmic equation or template?"

"Naw Jack, they serve the fat end to the Chiefs and the Wardroom and screw the crew."

"That thing have a name?"

"Yeah, it's called weird ass wedge cake."

Home on The Range Hamburgers

The old man felt we crossed the line on this one.

It was supposed to be hamburger night. The menu was posted, so we had three or four days advance notice.

'Hamburger patties, fluffy mashed potatoes, savory green beans and peach cobbler.'

(The guys at the Navy Cook School were real big on totally bullshit adjectives... savory, sumptuous, delectable, flavorful, crisp, fresh... never handmade horseshit or 'gag a maggot' stew. Don't get me wrong, the boats had the best cooks and served the best chow found in the combined U.S. Armed Forces.)

If they had imitated the 'Don't ask, don't tell' policy in the late 50's, most of us would have gone right out and purchased engagement rings for boat cooks... But most of them were so damn ugly, that would have been really tough.

Where was I? Oh yes, hamburger night.

The yeoman gave us a bunch of typing paper and loaned us his tape, scissors and stapler.

We made a bunch of paper cowboy hats. Grown men... defenders of the free world... sentinels manning the ramparts of democratic society sitting around cutting out gahdam stupid paper cowboy hats.

Once we were all fitted out with our trail drive hats, we made a chuck wagon. We made ours out of the bottom part of a shoebox and stapled a piece of paper to it like the cover on a covered wagon.

We all sneaked into the crew's mess and waited as the poor unsuspecting cook tossed his patties on the grill. As he did, an I.C. Electrician started cycling the electrical breaker to the grill... just enough to get a little 'burger sizzle' but not enough to cook the damn things... like taking ground beef to a tanning parlor.

Well after the normally expected cooking time had elapsed, the cook scooped them off the grill, put'em on a platter and passed them out to the crew. What you had was a platter of damn near raw burgers. We started 'mooing'.

"Moo."

"Moo."

"Mooo-oo-ooo".

"They're still alive."

Then, we started singing the Rawhide theme song.

"Keep'em movin' movin' movin... keep them dogies movin'... head'em up... move'em out... RAWHIDE."

Ten or fifteen grown men put on paper cowboy hats... took a hamburger patty... put'em on the deck and pushed them along the deck singing the Rawhide song and mooing. The herd continued through the control room and through the watertight door into the forward battery.

Here 'Rowdy Yates, the Scout' split off from the herd and 'rode' to the Yeoman's shack and grabbed a stapler. The officers were eating and he sat the stapler on the edge of the wardroom table and started using it like a telegraph key. The exec asked,

"What in the hell are you doing?"

"Sir... I'm checking the cattle prices in Abilene... the herd will be through here in a moment."

And then the herd headed forward where it turned around and returned.

The Old Man thought the whole damn After Battery needed professional help.

The cook became one of the most beloved members of the crew. When he made Chief, he got transferred. We loved the old bastard and missed the hell out of him.

We never saw him after that.

For years we have done our damdest to locate him for the reunions... no luck.

Life in a 311 foot, 6 inch steel pipe wandering around in the ocean was rarely exciting. You created your fun where you could. Stupid stunts, monkey business and communal ragging was an important part of keeping a smokeboat crews from 'goin' round the bend.' You have to have been a diesel boat raghat to fully appreciate the life we lived.

You had to be young and not securely bolted to the planet.

Remembering Diesel Boat Thanksgivings

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Memory is a wonderful means of cost-free transport. It allows old rascals to revisit their youth and romp all over yesteryear with the freedom of people with far younger legs.

After Thanksgiving dinner this year, I took a short snooze in my magic carpet daydreaming chair and revisited the old Requin messdeck once more for one of those old fashion 'no holds barred' Thanksgiving rollicking raghat free for alls.

Thanksgiving in the old sewer pipe navy was a really big deal... especially at sea.

Before shoving off on a run, the cooks laid in the requisite goodies... six to eight frozen turkeys (to be precooked the night before, two at a time and reheated reload-style prior to serving)... a half ton of spuds... twenty cans of yams... ten cans of cranberry sauce... assorted nuts... cornbread stuffing in cellophane bags and five boxes of El Cheapo cigars.

Cigars were a most important part of any fleet submarine celebratory meal. These were the days before the gloom and doomers invented 'secondhand smoke'. Hell, the air in the old diesel subs was 80% to 90% tobacco smoke, anyway. It was not without reason that the contraptions were called 'smoke-boats'.

The cigars were purchased by vote of the totally illegal... against regulation... every boat had one... slush fund committee.

The slush fund, known in the compartments inhabited by raghats as the 'saltwater saving and loan', was a long-standing boatservice financial institution that operated far beyond regulation by the FDIC, Federal Securities and Exchange Commission, the FBI, Secret Service, or the Naval Investigative Service, and its interest rate didn't have a damn thing to do with the chief monkey at the Federal Reserve. It was a bluejacket financial institution run along the principle of Jesse James economics... out of a cigar box under the foot of the COB's flashpad.

Every sonouvabitch in the crew was a deputized collection agent and was prepared to deny its existence up to the point that they administered the truth serum or set fire to your feet.

Where was I? Oh yes, the slush fund committee bought the obligatory five boxes of 'enlisted acceptable' cigars. By enlisted acceptable, I mean rolled dried vegetation of dubious origin, capable of being lit at one end allowing smoke to pass to the other end. Connection with anything that would be recognized in Cuba as tobacc, was highly unlikely.

Starting before sunset on the day prior to Thanksgiving, the cooks ran everyone but the two idiot messcooks out of the galley and started cooking the birds that had been removed from the reefer (freezer) on the Monday prior to Thanksgiving and thawed out in the cool room.

The messcooks got the job of reaching into the cavity, locating the bag of giblets and removing them. This required washing your hands with some kind of super germ killing soap supplied by and supervised by the Corpsman.

This is the type of job that, if not handled properly can get the poor messcooks ragged. So it must be handled like true professionals. To avoid terms like, "flunky gut handlers", and "bird gut shufflers", we would lay the bird carcass on the messtable, cover it with a fresh dish towel and give a running gynecological commentary during the removal process. Messcooking is part theatrical art and part menial servitude.

During the turkey cooking process, the aroma migrated into the berthing portion of the After Battery compartment. Before the last bird cleared the oven, the animals were so damn hungry that cannibalism was becoming a serious consideration.

The messcooks spent the time while the birds were cooking, whittling the hides off a half million potatoes. Every boatsailor of my day will remember those great big stainless steel bowls of what was announced over the IMC as "fluffy mashed potatoes". There was something about sub force mashed potatoes. I have never had better. The boats used real butter and made absolutely fabulous gravy.

It is no secret that the submarines got the best cooks. If you were a cook who came with a sub duty entry in your service jacket, you could damn near write your own ticket.

Thirty minutes prior to the appointed time that the messdeck opened, the hungry rats began forming a line that extended through the forward engine room.

The waiting animals began laughing, hooting, hollering, pushing, shoving, and engaging in what in the days before the kinder and gentler, sensitive revised naval vocabulary was known as 'grabass'.

"Okay, okay, let's knock off the grabass."

"Hey Chief... you close enough to see if those two lazy ass messcooks have the table set up? Hell Chief, I could chew the hip pockets out of a set of Mongolian dungarees."

"Try to exercise a little self control."

"Hey Buzz, damn messcooks are wearing clean aprons and new white hats."

"Must be the end of the world."

"You think we'll have pumpkin or apple pie this year?"

"Pumpkin... we loaded a case of canned pumpkin pie filler before we singled up."

"Hey chief... how're they doin'? I may starve to death any minute now."

"You won't be missed."

"You break my heart... whaddaya think comments like that do to my morale and sea warrior spirit?"

"Jack... is it possible for you to shut the hell up for ten minutes and give your shipmates a break?"

It was the kind of aimless bullshit conversation that filled time. Filling time while waiting was an art. Comments made in waiting formations didn't count against the allotted time God gave you on earth... God understood his submariners.

We could seat 14 at a sitting. After the first sitting got situated and the holiday bounty began, the food kept coming. After the meal, the cigars were passed around.

Within a couple of minutes, smoke filled the messdeck and depending on the sea state, the word was passed to open topside access hatches.

The lads waiting for the follow-on-sittings were strung out down the outboard passageway all the way back to the After Battery head. By the time the guys in the first sitting were relaxing and firing up their EL Cheapo stogies, the lads waiting were getting restless.

In an environment devoid of feminine civilizing influence, restless men begin to get vocal and as hunger escalated, vocabulary degenerates and the intent and solemnity of the holiday gets somehow forgotten in the press of the moment.

"Hey, you bastards gonna take all day?"

"I think the tribal elders are having smoke and bullshit for dessert."

"Many nasty smelling smoke sticks involved in pow wow."

"I think the sonuvabitches are incinerating a skunk."

"Hey... you one way bastards. Give your shipmates a break."

The longer they took the worse the mutiny got.

Waiting in a restless chowline for comfortably situated lard ass senior rates to complete both meal and post chowdown convivial bullshit exchange, was hell. It was like stroking and burping a three-month old.

After a while, the smiling cigar-puffing bastards started drifting aft.

"Hey you gut bandits outdid yourselves this year... great chow."

You could hear the clatter of dishes as the messcooks set the tables for the next setting.

Turkey... gravy... the best gahdam mashed potatoes you would ever have in your life... fantastic pumpkin pie... A big ol' fat El Roi Tan... sitting shoulder-to-shoulder with the finest men you would ever know... men who, in later life would drive a thousand miles just to shake your hand again, tell you, you were still a worthless bastard and make your wife laugh half the night. Men you would drive a thousand miles to pump a pint of blood for.

Every Thanksgiving, that is what I'm grateful for. I'm thankful I served in Arleigh Burke's Navy... thankful God gave me the sense to volunteer for submarines and thankful for the years spent with the big hearted, fun loving ugly bastards I shared turkey, cigars and bullshit with, on the day the pilgrims set aside to have some kind of luau with the Indians.

As an old coot, when I look back and inventory the good times, those were some of the best.

Locker Clubs by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

Locker Club? What in the hell is a Locker Club?

Bet that is the first question asked by one of today's modern bluejackets.

There was a time, not that long ago, when the United States Navy did not try to be all things to all people. There were no enlistment incentives, bonus bait...education credits or bright colored ribbon bucket dips. Also, the naval leadership encouraged the wearing of the uniform...not civilian clothes.

Men were proud to wear the uniform. This may have become an alien concept, but many of us enlisted simply to wear the uniform that was recognized around the globe as the symbol of the finest, sharpest, cleanest navy in the world.

Civilian clothes were not allowed on navy ships. Well, there were exceptions, like being allowed to carry them when visiting Bermuda. The government of Bermuda discouraged the wearing of the U.S. military uniform because it 'reduced the level of the foreign travel experience for American tourists'.

Shame on them. The men who wore that uniform protected them, defended their island and fed them by airlift during World War II. Remember 'Lend Lease'? Under Lend Lease, we got a 99-year naval base lease in Bermuda in exchange for the armament the British Isles needed for national survival and Bermuda got to crawl under America's military umbrella and get a regular chow call.

What we actually got was "asked to vacate" after 50 years and after 20 years...not to wear our uniform.

But travel to Bermuda was the exception.

Since back in the 50's, boatsailors assigned to SUBRON SIX had no barracks or 'ashore accommodations'. So there were locker clubs...establishments with row after row of metal lockers. They were the kind of lockers found in high school locker rooms and country clubs. They cost between seven and ten bucks a month.

Bell's Locker Club...1959. What did you get? You got an upright locker and access to a shower that steamed up the entire locker area...and what may have very well been the world's largest collection of sour towels.

There was a shoeshine boy. We called him 'buff 'em up, muthafuck' because that's all he ever said. Had a coffee can on a string around his neck. The can held two rolled up buffing rags, several wadded up polish application rags and three cans of black Lincoln shoe polish. (Adrian Stuke handed me back this memory...a very important part of our boat's history.)

The little kid was one helluva businessman...he probably owns a couple of hotels now or a major fast food chain. Hope so, anyway.

We'd come in from sea. Once the skipper put down liberty, we dropped off our laundry and hauled for Bell's for a beer and a hot shower.

The shower was a kind of international exchange of Athletes' Foot. It was like the global transfer point. I picked up a world-class case. They had exotic Athletes' Foot germs in there the size of crickets.

There was always a lot of noise. Married sailors, the quiet, mature sailors had homes to go to with hot water and other comforts. Senior rated single naval personnel normally had 'living arrangements' that included mixed gender back scrubbing and other mutually agreed upon advantages.

The 'Animals', the unmarried idiots occupying the lower rungs of the naval advancement ladder, made up the majority of the 'park your crap in a locker' society of saltwater buccaneers.

Chatter, nonsensical banter, bullshit exchange, hooting, hollering, cursing, the singing of ditties whose lyrics would make a female lumberjack blush, could be heard 24 hours a day.

Towel fighting of epic proportions took place...not Girl Scout camp terry cloth flipping love taps...no, we're talking towel gladiatorial combat that took triangular butt divots the size of the little pieces of meat in pork fried rice. I don't think anyone ever actually died in a Bell's Locker Club towel fight but several became Olympic champions and one poor fellow, if the unlucky sonuvabitch is still alive, probably still has an identifiable scar near the business end of his tallywhacker.

The clientele of Bell's Locker club had absolutely no taste in clothing...Esquire Magazine never held male fashion photo shoots in Bells' Locker Club.

Tribal Chieftains in Ping-Pong, New Guinea, blind Gypsies and Chinese homosexual fire dancers dressed more conservatively than the After Battery Rats off diesel submarines.

I once saw an electrician off the Carp hold up a lime green sports coat with copper metal threads interwoven in the material.

"Hey guys...you think the chicks will go wild when they get a load of this baby?"

The airlines put paper bags in seat pockets to handle what I thought of that coat. Whereas I had a Madras sports jacket that looked like a Mau-Mau bedspread.

Guys coming in from a long time at sea or a northern run would still be in the throes of channel fever. These euphoric idiots would come in hauling their 'duty-free' combustibles...open jugs and pass 'em around.

Sailors you had never seen before in your life would yell,

"Hey Buddy...have a snort."

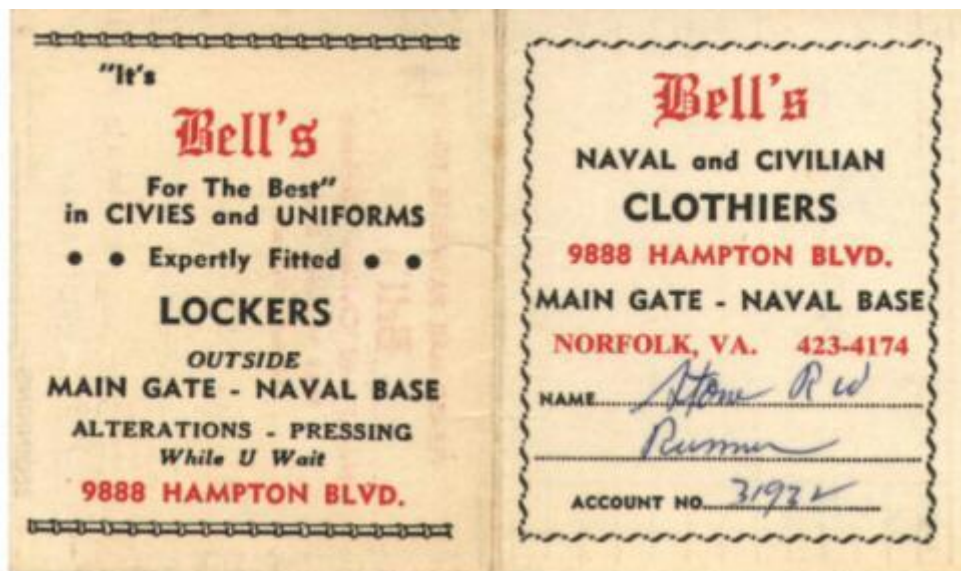
And you took a swig...didn't matter what it was or if the bastard looked like he had terminal gum disease...it was like smoking the obligatory tribal peace pipe. It was proper low end bluejacket etiquette, like moving over to make room for another baotsailor when the Bell's men's head was so loaded that guys were peeing down the floor drain... a matter of seagoing courtesy.

Bell's Locker Club...that and all the others are gone now...consigned to the memories that live on in old sailors and in stories they swap among themselves in the twilight of their lives.

Gone are the old COBs who would say,

"Son, welcome aboard...give your orders to the titleless wave forward. Stow your gear in this side locker and haul the rest of your crap up to a locker club up on Hampton Boulevard. Don't let 'em charge you more than ten bucks and hey, invest in some good shower shoes if you don't want to pick up some major league foot rot."

That's all gone now. But on a cold winter's evening when a bunch of old worn out SUBRON SIX smokeboat once-upon-a-time banditos are parked around a table sucking suds and swapping long ago memories, Ray 'Olgoat' Stone, an old diesel boat Chief Torpedo Pusher, takes out his old butt-bent leather wallet and gently removes a small piece of readily recognizable naval history...the highly regarded fraternal order of...



We Were The Last Rats Off The Old Tuna Can Boats by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

At some point limber holes, walking decks and tubes aft disappeared. It was a slow process... The 'tuna can navy' just sort of disappeared in ones and twos.

The smokeboats went to the scrap yard like the longhorns on the Ponderosa being shipped off to Chicago. The nests in the squadrons started thinning out.

Displaced personnel started running around like roaches hiding from the Orkin man, and some of the finest ship handling, submarine officers, started getting dead-end 'jocks and socks' assignments. Gold Dolphins started turning up in staff positions in locations that were a two-day Trailway's bus ride from saltwater... Men who had paid their national obligation dues in their early careers, playing a very one-sided game of pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey with Hirohito's navy. It was sad to see Dolphins and a six patrol Combat Pin over the pocket of some poor smokeboat bastard turkey farmed to Naval Supply Depot in Possum Pecker, Arkansas.

The rest of the diesel boat rats rarely heard the snap of the traps that were doing in their kind... No bloody shirts on the pier... No smokeboat sailor hides stretched on racks tanning in the sun on the tender boatdeck... No listing on the ingredients of the content of dog food cans reading 'diesel qualified sailor'. Just a silent reduction.

As big old wallowing black, no limber hole monsters started turning up, we noticed a marked indifference to tribal reduction in the 'Piston-powered Comanche Nation'. We sat on MEK cans topside and watched the SUBLANT high-powered, heavy shoulderboard haulers pass the brows leading to our sources of future Gillette blades, heading down the pier for mutual kitty licking sessions with the guys riding the submersible moonbeam barges.

The Navy started to discontinue stocking repair and replacement parts for the old smokies. That should have been a major indicator that made sense. The guys who run prisons rarely fund multiple organ transplants for guys on death row scheduled for the needle in a couple of months. So we cannibalized the boats being placed on the slaughterhouse conveyor belt... Like removing still operational organs from granny before jerking the plug on her respirator.

"Hey!! They're gonna scrap the USS Snakefish... Get over there and see if you can get her DRT stylus assembly... Her damn coffee urn... GDU wench... Any neoprene hatch gaskets... The volume knob off the RBO and her boat hook."

It always reminded me of animals in Africa ravishing the carcass of some freshly killed animal abandoned by the lion that brought it down.

There is nothing sadder than watching old combat workhorses heading for the scrap yard to be cut up and sold for the value of their metal content. I know that in all aspects of life, realism trumps sentimentality. I know that all ships have a finite useful mechanical life. I know that destruction of the equipment antiquated by progress is a normal and expected part of all mechanical life cycles.

Sure, only a blithering idiot doesn't know that.

But... The Navy gives you ships that you care for, that, become home and in most instances work their way into your heart. You would have to be one coldhearted sonuvabitch to watch an old girl who had hauled you safely through heavy weather and the oceans of the world, head off for the ignominy of dismemberment. A good sailor will shed tears in his soul... The silent painful tribute men who love ships feel in their hearts. We had the additional pain associated with the knowledge that our boats had taken crews of brave Americans to war, survived the risks magnified by being constantly hunted and attacked and had hauled their victorious crews home to the euphoric welcome of a grateful nation.

We bobbed up and down tethered to the pier and each other by frayed mooring lines. From that vantage point, we viewed the future.

And, what did the future look like? It was big... Damn, it was big. Big, black and uglier than a fifteen dollar whore. It may have looked sleek and streamlined at the incredible depths it was designed to operate at. But to lads who had grown accustomed to watching their own kind transit open expanses of saltwater by slicing through it with the ease and grace of a highly honed straight razor, progress looked ugly.

Before you modern day techno blujackets start jumping up and down and peeing in your poopie suits, I write for the lads of my era who rode the boats you guys replaced. I don't know any other life.

Let's face it... The nukes are on TV damn near every night... There are books being published on a regular basis, about every aspect of the nuclear submarine force. There are movies that exploit every facet of the nuclear submarine experience.

The boats we rode weren't whiz bang sexy. The life we lived wasn't an existence that Hollywood makes Richard Gere and Tom Cruise movies out of.

No replacement crews met us when we put our lines over. Nobody worried about the psychological implications of our operation. It was common knowledge that you *had* to be half nuts to ride diesel boats... And the Navy just let it go at that.

There were certain advantages to riding the boats with limber holes and walking decks. You always knew your approximate depth by what was leaking and the rate at which the water was coming in. You didn't have to know a damn thing about fusion, thermal

dynamics or rods in reactor cores. Uniform of the day could include a straw hat and dungarees with shirttails out... Sandals optional.

Most of us are 'long ago' submarine sailors... Old late in life unsalvageable coots. When we attended Sub School, they were teaching boats with hull numbers that folks ended up shaving with in the mid to late 1960s.

When we return to what we knew as New London Sub-Base... Now known as Groton Sub-Base, we wander around trying to find familiar landmarks... The escape tank vamoosed... The geedunk metamorphed into a rather unkempt McDonalds... The old Basic Enlisted Submarine School is gone... White Hat Club, gone...

After a while, you feel like a returning resident of Nagasaki in 1946, trying to locate his previous neighborhood from the pattern of remaining outhouse holes.

Life on an APL by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

When ships go into the yards, they 'offload' the contents and crew. In the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, that meant moving the crews into floating contraptions known as auxiliary personnel lighters... Floating steel boarding houses that could handle up to a light cruiser crew.

At the time we pulled into drydock #2, our crew along with a second boat crew had moved into 'musty mattress heaven', an APL located adjacent to our boat's drydock position.

To be honest, the accommodations weren't half-bad. Aboard subs, you had a locker the size of a breadbox and shared a bunk. On an APL, you could have all the broom closet-size lockers you wanted to homestead and could control a whole section of bunks. You could 'bunk hop' to an area with guys who listened to country music... Played hearts all night... Or maintained deck silence to get some sleep. The area where silence was maintained was known as the 'red light district' because we kept it in continual red light for odd-hour sleepers.

The first thing you did when you came aboard was haul musty mattresses topside, a navy enlisted evolution known as 'airing bedding'. APL mattresses were members of the same family as skid row flophouse mattresses. APL bedding was never high on the navy's priority list.

Also, we found that the below decks compartment ventilation needed some repair and maintenance before we could get proper airflow down in the bowels of the steel monster. The names and hull numbers of hundreds of ships were written or scratched into the paint everywhere, to which ours was added in several locations... USS REQUIN (SS-481).

Life aboard an APL, once you got into the routine, was about as good as naval service got.

You had morning muster after all the married brown baggers (khaki-sackers) turned up. At morning quarters, the engineering officer and chief of the boat divvied up the work assignments. Most rated petty officers took care of upgrading and part replacement on their assigned gear. The non-rated guys stood fire watches and cleaned our floating 'rat box'.

For men who spent a great deal of time beyond the limits of sunshine, life on an APL was a very agreeable novelty. The galley and messdeck were monstrous compared to anything we had experienced, other than on our tender and shore-based transient galleys.

Submariners had a long established tradition called 'open galley'. For those of you not familiar with the term, let me attempt to explain.

Any submariner who was willing to clean up after himself could break out anything he wished to eat and cook it for himself or a group of shipmates. Dining aboard submarines was about as informal as communal bread-breaking got. At times, submariners partaking of daily sustenance resembled Robin Hood's Merry Men at a Sherwood Forest feast. The only difference being we left things shipshape afterwards... And we had no dogs to toss scraps to.

Those who desired to, could phone for pizza and Chinese food deliveries.

Most evenings, someone would tap into the 1MC and since no one had yet invented ethnic sensitivity, would announce,

"Anyone wanting to get in on a chink chow order lay topside. First and last call for roast rat and noodles."

You could draw your chow and haul your steel shingle topside, watch the river traffic and duck seagull crap, out in fresh air, in either daylight or starlight.

We collected a load of discarded lawn furniture and created what we perceived to be a luxury liner promenade deck... But it looked more like the Beverly Hillbillies. I can't remember any officers coming aboard our floating raghat ghetto... We owned it.

We had practical factor lectures. Our corpsman, the ever-faithful Walter 'Doc' Rohre, taught us first aid. We learned how to field strip and clean all onboard small arms. We learned basic code and how to read flashing light. We learned how to read channel buoys, merchant ship colors and easily recognized stack markings. And, we learned about the evils of indebtedness, alcoholism and various types of VD... The kind girls all over the world were lined up to give stupid American bluejackets.

I can't imagine what it would have been like, living on a fully loaded APL. Somehow, I conjure up visions of overcrowded migratory labor camps or cheap hotels in Bangladesh. But they were pretty spacious for 130 boatsailors.

Most of the animals assigned bunks on the APL were non-rated idiots or junior petty officers. The mature enlisted leadership was either married or had a steady shack-up with some honey on the other side of the base gate.

The rambunctious wild men on the APL created their own amusement.

The most popular after hours sport was chariot racing. They had these two-wheel carts everywhere. When ships pulled into drydocks, they secured the sill (the opening by which a ship enters a drydock). They would float this metal dock door into place, then flood it down until it seated, forming a seal. Then, lines would be thrown to men on deck. These lines were faked down in those prepositioned carts.

Some civilian engineer was situated at the head of the drydock with a surveyor's transit and made hand signals to indicate which lines had to be taken in or slacked off on, to position the ship over large concrete blocks that the ship would rest on, as the water was pumped out and the hull settled in position. Then, the pumping began. After an hour or two, the ship came to rest on the concrete blocks, held in place by the network of lines. With all the lines in use, the little two-wheel carts were all standing around empty.

In the evening, we would form up teams and hold chariot races around the drydock, ala 'Ben Hur' style, with most of the horses being E-3s... Comprised of messcooks, firewatches and APL cleaning coolies. It's amazing what grown men could come up with to amuse themselves.

We also found that we could shoot welding rods one helluva long way out of the hoses of CO2 fire extinguishers. There were two tin-cans,,, Old 700 class Fletchers, in the drydock with us. At night, we would launch welding rods at the two destroyers. We called it 'Admiral Yamamoto Kamikaze Drill'. This might seem to some as 'stupid', but it passed time for kids who were broke and bored as hell.

The dumbest thing that was done, was pulled off by two drunks returning one night. At one side of the drydock was a covered shed with several time clocks... A rack of time cards... And several hundred yellow safety helmets with big, black '72's painted on them. Shop 72 was the riggers shop.

When the two loaded returning bluejackets returned, they noticed that the stacks of the two destroyers had been removed and placed on the floor of the drydock. Well, these two totally inebriated undersea warriors proceeded to toss all... Repeat, ALL... Of the yellow Shop 72 helmets at the two destroyer stacks, keeping score of those actually going into the stacks.

The next morning, all hell broke loose when men started to punch in and found the floor of the drydock literally covered with Shop 72 yellow helmets. A four-striper showed up, snorting fire and ready to pour molten lava on the clown or clowns responsible. We underwent a mass interrogation, during which time the little irate, fireplug-built bastard must have said, "When I get my gahdam hands on the sonuvabitches responsible for this stunt, I'm going to...", fifty or sixty times.

We stood there along with the two now badly hung-over culprits with the look of total innocence submarine crews often adopt when the lion-tamers and alligator wrestlers show up. Under threat of dismemberment, being boiled in oil and a complete litany of possible unpleasantness, we explained that to us, it appeared to be the kind of thing a tin can sailor would do.

After the captain left, we all shook hands and took the customary sub crew blood oath not to give up the culprits. Straight face lying to heavyweight authority came with Silver Dolphins... But never to commissioned members of the brotherhood, except what was required for favorable consideration at Captain's Mast.

Many favorable memories were hand built in navy yards. All submariners have them.

The Days of the Topside Dogshack by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

They're long forgotten, but the old After Battery Rats of long ago remember them. Today's atomic boatsailor has no idea what his ancestral brothers were given to stand winter watches in.

I visited New London recently and was given a tour of one of the modern leviathans tied up in a lower base slip. Adjacent to the brow was a glass-enclosed structure where two modern day undersea warriors sat in air conditioned comfort, standing access control duty. It took me back.

It kick started memories of lonely hours standing (emphasis on the word 'standing') midwinter topside watches in 'brass monkey' weather. A four hour tour of feet stamping, hand rubbing, freezing deck tours.

They... Who in the hell 'they' were, I have no idea... But they created a contraption known by the lower rated animals as a 'topside watch dogshack'. The damn things were made out of paper-thin plywood along the same architectural lines as a one-holer outhouse. The flimsy things had a hinged door with one Plexiglas window and a screen door latch.

They could be jackassed from the pier pallbearer fashion by two non-rated lads and placed on the designated boats upon arrival. Once the boat was secure and all of the obligatory routine followed by returning boats had been taken care of, two Orion Jack-

in-the-box IC Electricians popped up and rigged a telephone in the plywood dogshack and handed over a Norfolk area phonebook that was two or three years out of date.

The inside of the wooden box was decorated with primitive Neanderthal inscriptions like the walls of prehistoric caves...

'Great pizza.....METRO 4-6985'

'Alice.....CENTRAL 6-2948'

'Trailways to Philadelphia leaves 1430'

'ORION quarterdeck.....BK-384'

'Squadron office.....BK-306'

The plywood warped. Idiots carved holes in them out of stupidity and boredom. In short, the damn things were far from being airtight. In frigid weather, they gave you a little heater. But every time you had to tour the deck, check the lines and make sure that space aliens hadn't boarded the ship in the intervening fifteen minutes since your last 'turn of the deck' with the constant opening and closing of the flimsy door, heater or no heater, you still froze your butt off.

You could wrap yourself up in a foul weather jacket, pull on two pairs of foul weather pants and a bridge parka, and still feel ice cubes forming in your veins. I don't know about the rest of you, but I have never been as cold in the rest of my life as I was as a non-rated boatsailor.

I spent many an hour stamping my feet and watching the vapor of my breath, both on the bridge at sea and standing topside watches. Oddly enough, I think I became a better and stronger man for having endured it. You see, that's how the sub force built submariners. The system sorted the weak from the tough and sent the weak packing.

The contrast in our service is mirrored in microcosm in the way we stood winter security watches and the accommodations we were given... The way we lived and the love we had for the ships that took us out and brought us safely home.

Someone needs to write our story. It needs to be told. We were not a footnote to naval history. We were not a bunch of raggedy bastards nursing worn-out, submersible hardware. We were a helluva lot more than 'has-beens' relegated to the backwaters of events.

I refuse to be characterized as such and will do my damndest to capture as much of it as I remember in these old man's memories.

Once Upon a Time by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

One of the benefits of growing old is the gift of time... Time to look back and revisit your collective 'Life Experiences',

For old smokeboat sailors, that means time to shuffle through memories of pissing against the wind in faded soft dungarees, frayed raghats and zinc chromate-spattered broghans. You can close your eyes and be transported back to a time when men wore acid-eaten uniforms, breathed air worse than the primate house at a poorly managed zoo, whittled mold and rot off food of advanced age being reclaimed by the gods of putrifaction, and surgically carving off the stuff and eating it. You survived and built up an immunity that could handle leprosy, lockjaw and cobra bites. We survived. Submarine duty was rough.

Many of us 'hotsacked'. For those of you who missed that life experience, hotsacking was sharing sleeping arrangements (to put it in easily understood terms). A system that required lads at the entry level of the undersea service profession, to crawl onto a sweat-soaked flashpad just vacated by another bottom-feeding shipmate. Lads of today's modern technically advanced undersea service would find it damn near impossible to imagine a day when lads who hadn't showered in weeks, climbed a tier of racks sharing sock aroma on par with three-day old roadkill, with his bunkmates... A time when raghats communally shared blankets that looked like hobo camp hand-me-downs.

It was a time when the common denominator of the naval supply system was the cockroach, with the longevity of Jack LaLanne. Cockroaches that could deflect claw-hammered blows and could reach rodeo entry size.

In the late 50's, the submarines built in the twilight years of World War II were rapidly approaching an advanced age comotose state. The navy quit making many of the replacement parts for these seagoing antiques, so we cannibalized the boats in line heading to the scrapyard. It was like harvesting organs from a dead Rockette to keep the chorus line going. After decommissioning, the old boats would have electricians and machinists crawling all over them with shopping lists and wrenches.

Memory is a wonderful God-given gift. There were sunrises and sunsets, rolling seas, visits to exotic places, and ladies with loose panty elastic and no AIDS. There were consumable combustibles on par with the liquids that propel hardware to outer space.

It was a time when the world's population loved the American submariner. Boatsailors in port meant good times, hell-raising and calling in the night shift at the local brewery. It was a time when the United States Navy had no recruitment problems, paid no incentive money and had to kiss no butts to entice grown men into accepting their manly obligation to their nation. Men signed up for undersea service, motivated by patriotic obligation, a sense of history and adventure, and to follow the gallant

submariners who rode the boats against the Japanese empire. We wanted to wear the distinctive insignia universally recognized as the symbol of the most successful and demanding submarine service on earth.

We were proud. We had a right to be. We were accepted as the downline fraternity brothers of the courageous men who put Hirohito's monkey band all over the floor of the Pacific. We rode their boats, ate at their mess tables, slept in their bunks and plugged the ever-increasing leaks in the hulls they left us. We patted the same barmaid butts they had patted when they were far younger and half as wide. We carved our boats names and hull numbers on gin mill tables in places that would give Methodist ministers cardiac arrest.

We danced with the devil's mistress and all her naughty daughters. We were young, testosterone-driven American bluejackets and let's face it... Every girl in every port establishment around the globe both recognized and appreciated the meaning of a pair of Dolphins over a jumper pocket. Many of these ladies were willing to share smiles and body warmth with the members of America's undersea service.

It was a time when the snapping of American colors in the ports of the world stood for liberation from tyranny and the American sailor in his distinctive uniform and happy-go-lucky manner, stood for John Wayne principles and a universally recognized sense of decency, high ideals and uncompromised values.

It was in every sense of the term, 'A great time to be an American sailor'.

There were few prohibitions. They were looked upon as simply unnecessary. It was a time when 'family values' were taught at family dinner tables, at schools, the nation's playing fields, scout troops, Sunday school or other institutions of worship. We were a good people and we knew it.

We plowed the world's oceans guarding her sea lanes and making her secure for the traffic of international commerce. But at eighteen, let's face it... We never thought much about the noble aspect of what we were doing. Crews looked forward to the next liberty port, the next run, home port visits, what the boat was having for evening chow, the evening movie after chow, or which barmaids were working at Bell's that evening. We were young, invincible and had our whole lives ahead of us. Without being aware of it, we were learning leadership, acceptance of responsibility and teamwork in the finest classroom in the world... A United States submarine.

It was a simpler time. Lack of complexity left us with clear-cut objectives and the 'bad guys' were clearly defined. We knew who they were, where they were and that we had the means, will and ability to send them all off to hell in a fiery package deal. We were the 'good guys' and literally wore 'white hats'.

What we lacked in crew comfort, technological advancements and publicity, we made up for in continuity, stability and love of our boats and squadrons. We were a band of brothers and have remained so for over half a century.

Since we were not riding what the present day submariner would call 'true submersibles', we got sunrises and sunsets at sea... The sting of wind-blown saltwater on our faces... The roll and pitch of heavy weather swells and the screech of seabirds. I can't imagine sea duty devoid of contact with these wonders. To me, they are a very real part of being a true mariner.

I'm glad I served in an era of signal lights... Flag messaging... Navigation calculation... Marines manning the gates... Locker clubs... Working girls... Hitchiking in uniform... Quartermasters, torpedomen and gunner's mates... Sea store smokes... Hotsacking... Hydraulic oil-laced coffee... Lousy mid rats... Jackassing fish from the skids to the tubes... One and two way trash dumping... Plywood dog shacks... Messy piers... A time when the Chief of the Boat could turn up at morning quarters wearing a Mexican sombrero and Jeezus sandals... When every E-3 in the sub force knew what paint scrapers, chipping hammers and wire brushes were for... When JGs with a pencil were the most dangerous things in the navy... When the navy mobile canteen truck was called the 'roach coach' and sold geedunk and pogeey bait... When the breakfast of champions was a pitcher of Blue Ribbon, four Slim Jims, a pack of Beer Nuts, a hard-boiled egg, and a game of Eight Ball.

It was a time when, if you saw a boatsailor with more than four ship's patches on his foul weather jacket, he was at least fifty years old and a lifer. A time when skippers wore hydraulic oil-stained steaming hats and carried a wad of binocular wipes in their shirt pockets. In those days, old barnacle-encrusted chiefs had more body fat than a Hell's Angel, smoked big, fat, lousy smelling cigars or 'chawed plug', and came with a sewer digger's vocabulary.

It was a time where heterosexuals got married to members of the opposite sex or patronized 'working girls', and non-heterosexuals went Air Force... Or Peace Corps.

It was a good time... For some of us, the best time we would ever have. There was a certain satisfaction to be found in serving one's country without the nation you so dearly loved having to promise you enlistment bonuses, big whopping education benefits, feather bed shore duty, or an 'A' school with a sauna and color TV. It was a time when if you told a cook you didn't eat Spam or creamed chipped beef, everybody laughed and you went away hungry... And if you cussed a messcook, you could find toenail clippings in your salad.

Our generation visited cemetaries where legends of World War II undersea service were issued their grass blankets, after receiving their pine peacoats and orders to some old hull number moored at the big silver pier in the sky. We were family... Our common heritage made us brothers.

here came a point where we drew a line through our names on the Watch, Quarter and Station Bill, told our shipmates we would see them in hell, shook hands with the COB, paid back the slush fund, told the skipper 'goodbye', and picked up a disbursing chit and your DD-214. We went up on Hampton Boulevard, bought a couple of rounds at Bells, kissed the barmaids, gave Thelma a hug, then went out to spend the rest of our lives wishing we could hear, "Single up all lines...", just one more time.

Bullshit and Cinnamon Buns by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

The below decks watch heads aft to wake the oncoming watch.

The damn below decks watch always roused you out right in the middle of a dream that consisted of rendezvousing with girls with butterball proportion bust development and skimpy removable lingerie. The damn guy wandered through the compartment with a flashlight and clipboard looking for the lads.

One thing about 'hotsacking'... Hotsacking, hotbunking or warm racking was the result of a shortage of bunks in the old smokeboats. Non-assigned bunking required a crew member at the bottom-feeder level of the undersea social order, to root through a compartment of walrus snoring animals to find an available vacant bunk and one or two leper colony cast off blankets to Burrito-wrap himself in. We were the navy's equivalent of homeless people. Lincoln's 14th. amendment failed to free the non-rated folks.

Another thing about nomadic sleeping arrangements... Nobody knew where any sonuvabitch was sleeping, so the below decks watch had to conduct some kind of nocturnal Easter egg hunt, to find all the poor bastards to rack out for watch relief. The clown roamed around indiscriminately shining a flashlight the size of a Mack truck headlight in sleeping faces.

"Zat you, Armstrong?"

"Hell no, you dumb bastard. Get that gahdam thing out of my face."

"You know where Armstrong is?"

"Wasn't my week to keep up with him. Now, get the hell outa here, and take that f**king light with you!"

And, so it went. But the bastards always found you, eventually...

"Zat you, Armstrong?"

"Yeah... Yeah... Get that gahdam light out of my face before I rearrange your dental work."

And so it went as the oncoming watch was rudely evicted from their temporary homesteads and stumbled around locating boots, ratty foulweather gear and pulled their watch caps out from the corner of the flashpad where everyone stuffed them when they crawled up on 'em to rack out.

"Got a smoke for a working man?"

"I'm not your gahdam mother."

"Want to adopt me? I'm cute and loveable..."

"Pipe down, idiot. You know where Stuke is sacked out?"

"Check the after room."

"Thanks."

So, you stumbled to the after battery head to take a wake-up whiz, slap some water on your face to dissolve your sleepers and clear your eyes.

"Hey you guys, you catch a whiff of those cinnamon buns when you rolled outta the rack?"

"Yeah... Hope the milk hasn't gone bad. We've been out three weeks, so it should be headin' south about now."

"Nothing worse than bug juice and buns."

"Drink coffee, you simple idiot."

One thing was always in short supply on diesel submarines... Polite conversation. Especially around 2345 at 412 feet below the surface.

Eventually, you wandered into the crews mess and drew a cup of that bottom of the pot Maxwell House iguana plasma that passed for coffee when you were underway.

"Hey Murphy, you make this coffee?"

"Yeh, what of it?"

"Whadidja use, Yugoslavian army socks?"

"You know why they don't send donkeys to college? Nobody likes a smart ass."

"That's it Murphy. It's over between us. Give me back my engagement ring."

Midnight inane, go nowhere conversation between the best friends you would ever have.

"Hey, toss me a couple of those buns."

"Say please."

"Don't make me have to come in there and part your hair with a gahdam GDU wrench."

The buns were always hot, sticky and fresh. Never had better before or since. It was like living next door to the best bakery in town.

"Anyone know how Chicago's doing?"

"They were three games out when we shoved off. Check with the radioman... He gets stuff like that from the squadron."

"Watz the weather like topside?"

"Whadda you care? The old man's standing night orders don't call for us to hit the surface until 0800."

"Murf, any dope on where we're gonna put in?"

"Mr. Caldwell said for me to give him a list of anything I needed besides milk and eggs, and Quesada said the old man and Mr. Hall were going over a chart of the waters off Nova Scotia and looking at the approaches to Halifax."

"I like Halifax. Lotts a good looking gals... Good beer... But colder than a witch's tit in the winter."

"Damn ice hockey land. Who in the hell can figure out that game?"

"Get out of her Danny... If it doesn't involve dice, cards or shooting raccoons out of trees, it's too complicated for a dumb hillbilly like you."

"Murf, is there anything in that navy cookbook of yours concerning anything you can turn out for mid rats but cheese, green-edge balony and mayonnaise sandwiches?"

"No... The guys on the 8 to 12 are making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches."

"No, the guys on the 8 to 12 are eating evening chow leftovers and raiding the cool room."

"Yeah, but no cinnamon buns."

"You've got a point... Any milk gone bad?"

"Not yet..."

As time passed, more ragged, unshaved men in tattered dungarees arrived, yawning and wiping sleep cinders from their eyes.

"Jeezus, why can't you ugly bastards make some decent, fresh coffee?"

"That's great stuff... It separates the weak-hearted from the real boat sailors."

"Dex, you must have the IQ of a retarded fruit fly."

"Nah, if I was that stupid, I'd become an IC electrician from New Jersey."

The chief, who spent his watch smoking cheap, stinky cigars, drinking coffee, talking about stuff that happened before you were born in something called the 'old navy', came in and dumped a load of raw wisdom and old coot philosophy on us.

"How come section three always sounds like a kindergarten class on the playground?"

"Because in the old navy, back when stupid ugly men joined the navy to keep from going to the pokey, they got issued defective ears to match their defective eyes."

"No chief, you spend five to ten years with your big E-8 lard ass planted in front of the hydraulic manifold smoking reject cigars and your thought filter gets clogged up."

"Okay, okay... You bell-tapping bastards get your worthless butts forward and relieve the watch. We won't be taking her up on the roof until after sun up, so let's hit it."

You slipped a napkin-wrapped cinnamon bun in your pocket and pulled out your pack of smokes... Lit up and ducked to get through the watertight door to enter the control room.

It was all long ago. We were very young, but years have passed and somewhere we passed through the invisible curtain and without realizing it, became members of that mythical band of brothers known as the 'old navy'. Old bastards with lard asses who get together now and then, and wonder about the 'new navy'. Hmmm...

Gringo Gets A Free One

by Bob 'Dex' Armstrong

I really don't know exactly how to begin this, so I will just jump in. James Parks asked for this one but I fear has chosen a most flawed vehicle for its conveyance. How does one with limited ability share 'Old Gringo'... Old crusty Tom Parks, with a world who never had both the opportunity and the honor of knowing this remarkable gentleman?

For those of you who never exchanged insults and memories with the Gringo, I will do my best to paint a picture of him from all the component parts he installed in my heart. I hope he would approve... But I have my doubts. He was a man who constantly discounted his tremendous contribution.

He did not start out to be a submarine sailor... His father had been an Aviation Machinist Mate and he had a brother on the USS Langley. Tom Parks wanted to be an Aviation Machinist Mate. God, in his infinite wisdom felt that the naval aviation branch already had enough of the Parks family, did whatever was necessary to put young Tom on a sub tender and eventually the young bluejacket found his way to an old S-boat... The S- 39. At the time, the old S- Boats were being replaced by new, long-range fleet submarines arriving slowly for duty with the fleet. Tom just tossed his gear aboard and found himself as a Machinist Striker playing nursemaid to antiquated Nelseco engines. Most of us never heard of Nelseco Diesel Engines... Primarily because there are damn few people around today who ever put a wrench on one. Tom told me that the Devil turned the damn things out in the basement of Hell and they made men out of boys faster than natural law intended. Tom spent the early part of his boat service wrestling the sonuvabitches and learning to cuss.

At one point in his non-rated, non-qualified days, Tom went A.W.O.L. to spend time with his brother who was serving aboard the USS Langley. They spent a great couple of days together and did not know at the time that they were building a memory that the Japs would make last a lifetime. Having spent the 6th. and much of the 7th. of December, 1941 together, Tom said goodbye to Jim and was immediately tossed in the brig when he reported back aboard the Canopus the evening of the 7th. Needless to say, word of the events at Pearl Harbor reached the Philippines in short order and the war began for the Asiatic fleet. The Langley later went down as a result of enemy action and Tom never saw his brother again.

The powers that regulate naval service frown on unscheduled family reunions unblessed by appropriate authorization and young Tom Parks was hauled before the skipper at mast and received the max restriction given for such a breach of discipline. The Old Man gave him the naval equivalent of being roasted alive. It looked like Tom would be spending a lot of time restricted to his boat.

But once again young Tom was saved by divine intervention in the form of a boatload of arriving aircraft piloted by personal friends of Admiral Yamamoto, the absolute winner in the Jap stupidity game. History has recorded that all hell broke loose... It failed to record that in the confusion and chaos that followed, a Machinist Mate on the S-39 wiggled out of the doghouse and promptly found himself up to his armpits in a 'played for keeps' shooting war. Tom had escaped with only the clothes on his back. All his other navy issue... His records and notes were destroyed in the bombing. It took Uncle Sam until 1945 to cut a reimbursement check for his belongings.

Tom Parks never set out to place himself at the vortex of world events. He was an average man who woke up one day and found himself riding a worn-out, leaking submarine right smack in the crossroads of Hell... Tom Parks was riding an antiquated float in the Devils' Mardi Gras parade.

What made Tom special was that he was one of those brave men who responded to their nation's call in her most desperate hour and wrote their names and deeds in gold letters ten feet high, in the heroic effort that became known as the Submarine War in the Pacific. He was one of a gallant band of men who chose to risk all of their tomorrows for a crack at the heavy weight champ... Men who went out day after terror-filled day and broke the back of the Jap Navy... And put their Nipponese bluejackets and seagoing hardware all over the floor of the Pacific.

I am not sure how many patrols Tom made... I do know that he maxed out the number of gold stars the Navy provided holes for in a combat patrol pin. I know this because shortly after his death his son, James Parks was going through his papers and found a handful of the cards given by the Sub Force (Pacific) after each patrol to men authorized to wear the submarine combat patrol pin. Though Tom would have never characterized himself as a hero, the silent collection of cards did that for him... And told his son that he was genetically linked to a fine American who paid his dues at a time when dues paying was a very serious business. Tom Parks fully paid for every thread in the flag he was buried under... Several times over.

But, Old Gringo was not a man who wrapped either his deeds or himself in a mantle of self-importance. Far from it... He was a lighthearted man with an extraordinary sense of humor and a gift for verbally painting pictures that are keepers for all time. He could shoot a harpoon clean through you and have you rolling on the deck in uncontrolled laughter. My memories will always include the posted grenades Tom left on our household computer. It was always an unexpected joy to get a message from the Gringo Man. God, how I do miss it.

I only spoke to him once by phone. I had located a pair of Navy coffee mugs with World War II Combat Patrol pins embossed on the side. I sent one to Old Gringo and one to Ron 'Warshot' Smith, another totally unsalvageable smokeboat warrior cut out of the same tree.

Old Gringo phoned to tell me he would use it... Never wash it and from time to time, test it for tolerance to combustible liquids. During the conversation, he related a story that his son has authorized me to attempt to piece together from memory. I feel awkward since I will never be able to do it justice... The justice it so deserves. There is something in it to offend damn near everyone who lives the marshmallow existence dictated by the gentle sensitivity of the modern world. Gringo, for all of his sterling attributes, was not one you could call, a gentle sensitive man... He liked his slice of life with the bark still on it.

With all disclaimers in place, here is Gringo's story: During one of his war patrols, operating out of Australia, his boat sunk a large Jap naval vessel... I believe a cruiser. The ship had been a major player in the New Guinea Campaign and was well known in Australia. The word of the sinking of this nasty bastard reached Australia before the arrival of Gringo's boat.

When they pulled in, they were met by anyone who could ride or walk to the pier. Women young and old... Kids... A band... Old Aussie coots in digger hats, too old for the fighting but wearing medals. Some were still carrying shrapnel picked up in Turkey and France in World War I. Gallant rascals who slapped the returning submariners on the back and slipped them assorted firewater on par with P-38 fuel. Gringo said it beat the Fourth of July... A festive occasion to rival a coronation.

At one point, the proprietor of what Gringo called "A major first class knockin' shop" (a bordello) got so caught up in it all, that in a fit of uncontrolled euphoria she declared that the entire crew could have "A free one on the house".

The next day, according to our friend, the liberty section showed up to take advantage of this once in a lifetime opportunity. But, by the time they arrived they found other early rising sportsmen had beat them to this distribution point of carnal delight and the line extended well down the street.

What the Hell. The crew got into line and eventually each and every one got what Old Gringo described as the best combat award he ever got. He said on a balmy summer night he could still get a whiff of perfume and taste cheap lipstick. Gringo was definitely a man who enjoyed simple pleasures and had a memory like a steel trap.

But the story was not ended. In about 1947 a number of the crew of Old Gringo's boat got together... To have a few drinks, show off their new brides, tell a few sea stories and celebrate life, remember those who didn't make it back and be thankful for their survival. As the night wore on... And the alcohol flowed the atmosphere became somewhat relaxed... Very relaxed. At this point Tom Parks rose and yelled, "Anyone remember the free one in Australia?"

"Dex, there was silence, total silence. I looked around and my old shipmates were looking at their newly acquired bed partners and shook their heads... 'Darling, I have no idea what Tom is talking about.' Men who mastered the intricacies of

submarine engineering... Memorized some of the most complex procedures, suddenly had an attack of mass amnesia."

"I came to the conclusion that once in Australia, I stood in a whorehouse line that ran damn near fifty yards and got a free one and nobody was in that line."

I rolled on the deck. That is one of my favorite sea stories. Tom parks wore cloth Dolphins, a fully loaded combat patrol pin and a pocket load of very meaningful ribbons... He went to war, contributed mightily to the last total and absolute victory this nation ever had... When Tom Parks returned there were no remaining enemy troops or leaders left behind to fester and foment additional nastiness. Just dead ones and spiritually converted, subdued rascals with all the fight extracted. He served with men who fully understood the term 'unconditional surrender'... Their generation would accept no less. You would have found it impossible to hand these men 'Peace with honor' bullsh*t... They didn't have to look over their shoulder to see if any coalitions were coming unglued... They were THE COALITION, and when they turned out the lights, the party was truly over.

He was my friend. His son sent me his photo. It hangs on my bedroom wall and I look at it each night... To remember why I rode submarines and remind me that once upon a time, giants roamed the earth.

G'Night Old Gringo... Save me a place in the "free one" line.