

# The After Battery Rat

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## The Take From a Trash Dumper

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 chauffeuring 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 scrapyard. 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.