

The After Battery Rat

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Boat Deck Movies on Orion

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.