

The After Battery Rat

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And It Never Got Any Better

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, gauge 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?