

The After Battery Rat

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Blue Jackets Trav'lin Light

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 for 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.

Dex