

The After Battery Rat

Volume 5, Issue 2 – Insert. By Dex Armstrong with Permission

May 2004

Liberty in the Land of Oz

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

Contribution from Dex

From Joe Roche:

The main theme of this issue of the Sirago newsletter is "memorable liberty ports". On our virtual tour between reunions we have arrived in the "Med". Dex (a Requin SS481 sailor) reminisces about going on Liberty.

Joe



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.