

The After Battery Rat

Volume 8, Issue 2 – Insert. By Dex Armstrong with Permission

May 2007

How to Steal Heaving Lines

Everyone is giving away Cold War secrets and I got to feeling left out. I thumbed through my mental submarine secrets locker and came up with some topside master thief techniques.

Do boats still use heavies? Hell, they probably come alongside and activate big electro-magnets or some kind of hydraulic coupling contraption... Damn things have no walking deck. You would have to be a national logrolling champ to walk fore and aft topside. For all I know, they don't even have a deck force... Hell, Earl Schieb may paint 'em when they come in.

In the old 'Six five feet and report your leaks' navy we had mooring lines. For those of you practitioners of poopysuitology who may still use heaving lines, I offer this as a diesel boat hand me down.

To begin... For those of you out there who never stood on a wet deck, standing there waiting to toss over your lines to some half awake idiot on the pier... Here's how it went.

At some point this side of the Chesapeake Lightship, the old man got his nest assignment. Last boat in usually drew an outboard assignment... Slipping boats into the middle of a nest was hell on ballast tanks. Did it a couple of times, but they were exceptions.

When the skipper got his pier and nest assignment, a call went out for deck force topside and you made your way topside hauling 'T' wrenches, to pop open the line locker lids. Smokeboats had four line lockers... Brest lines fore and aft and two sets of lockers for amidships spring lines.

You popped open the lockers and folded back the lids. The lines were coiled around four stationary pipes welded to the pressure hull. You pulled out the lines and 'faked' them down topside. Requin used 3-lay hemp hawser... I love the smell of wet hemp in the morning... Smells like... Victory... It's a deck force memory.

People take pride in their rates. Many of them were never deck apes... I was. Everyone takes pride in something. I guess even a good sewer digger takes pride in a well dug sewer.

I studied deck-apery under Adrian Stuke...The man knew topside like the inside of Lucy's bloomers. When it came to marlinspike seamanship and topside and bridge gear, the Stuke-ee-man was as good as they came. Requin was a goodlooking boat and Adrian Stuke deserves the credit. We goofed off...There are epic tales of our goofing off... We raised the standard of naval screwing around to heights never envisioned in the annals of submarine history.

But topside never suffered. We owned it. We kept the old girl dolled up like a hundred dollar call girl. If she was a painted lady, we were the bastards who handled her cosmetics. MEK and number seven gray... Over zinc chromate.

The old man never returned to a lousy looking boat the day following a night when we tied up. We painted her under the lights... Over the side in paint punts... Sucking smoke from the first night in battery charge. The last thing was to mask and paint in our big white 481 hull numbers on the side of our conning tower fairwater. The old man called us his gahdam shoemaker's elves. That made hauling paint pots and 225 lb. air hose around in the dark something special.

We used hemp lines. When you put a strain on them, they snap-crackle and pop... If they start to part, they warn you... A lay comes spiraling back to let you know she's about to go and warning you to clear out. A nylon line stretches and goes with no warning. She can come back with a bullwhip action that can cut a deck ape in half or shoot his ass thirty feet out into the slip. Bad stuff, nylon lines... They don't rot but they can tear you in two.

So you broke out your mooring lines and positioned them. Then you opened the pressure locker originally intended for ready ammo for the five-inch deck gun. Gone in some long ago indian trade. Out of the pressure locker came heaving lines.

"What in the hell is a heaving line?", the modern bluejacket asks.

Glad you asked.

It was fifty feet of line resembling clothesline cord... With a knot called a 'monkey fist' on one end. The monkey fist contained something to give it the weight needed to propel it like a projectile to the pier or outboard boat. One of the very few productive things enginemen did was save large metal nuts to give to the deck force to use in making heavies.

We had one known as simply 'the gahdam monster'... The monkey fist on that lethal bastard contained a pool ball from Bells. If you

threw the damn thing just right you could drop a charging rhino. We once cold-cocked a first class quartermaster on the bridge of the Cubera, named Turnip Seed, with 'the gahdam monster'. Nobody ever believed us but it was an accident. If you are out there somewhere Turnip Seed... Honest to God, we didn't clock you on purpose. And for you who are saying,

"Dex you old bullshit artiste, nobody was ever named Turnip Seed."

His first name was 'Turnip', last name 'Seed'. I saw his I.D. and liberty card... Don't know if he shot his mom and dad for it but that's what they named him. He was lucky they weren't partial to marigold.

When you came in to tie up, at some point whoever was conning the boat on the bridge would yell,

"Put your lines over when you can."

The 'when you can' was taken as a personal challenge to the manhood of every ape topside with a heavie. You made one toss to 'wet 'er down' then coiled it up again and started trying to hit the poor jerks on the pier or topside on the outboard boats. The other boats wet their heavies down coming up the Elisabeth river channel. We did that and a heavie trailed aft and got wrapped around a prop shaft. A hint to anyone currently throwing heavies... Wet 'em down in the slip.

When you got your heavies to the receiving line handlers, you would 'bend' (attach) them onto the 'eye' of your mooring lines. The receiving line handlers would haul them over and drop them onto either a pier bollard or a deck cleat and you would winch the boat in by reeling in your brest lines with the forward and after hydraulic capstans. Then you would pass over your crossover spring lines... Shove over the brow... Get your mailbags and a load of fresh milk and you were home... Anchor pool winners were paid off and the liberty section stinking of a wholesale foo-foo soaking and hauling dirty laundry, would catapult to the beach or some waiting honey on the pier.

Heaving lines took time to make so the boat that owned them wanted to get them back. To aid in recovery, each boat color-coded their heavies. Like western cattle brands, each boat had a distinctive, one-of-a-kind color-code to stop heavie rustling. Requin was the worst, no 'count bunch of heavie rustlers that ever rode the range. We were so bad that when boats from other squadrons came in they would yell,

"We know about you heavie-stealing sonuvabitches... We want four heavies back, you one-way bastards... You got that? We're keeping an eye on all of you!"

We always gave 'em back two.

Here's how you color-code a heavie. You take a gallon paint can... Let's say your boat code is red & white. You hold the heavie above the open can with red paint and lower it in until the monkey fist hits the bottom of the can and pull it up....you now have a heavie that is all red up to eight or ten inches... You let it dry. When dry, you dunk it in a can of white paint just enough to cover the monkey fist. When it dries a second time, you have a handy-dandy red and white heaving line.

Cattle rustlers used something called 'running irons' to alter cattle brands. Somewhere I heard that evidence of some evil bastard tinkering around with your cattle brand would be found on the inside of the hide... Musta been hell on cows.

To abscond with a heavie, you soaked it in methel-ethyl-ketone then dunked it in a deeper bucket the first time, just enough to cover the previous first dip. Rotten, lowlife way to do business but it kept your heavie stealing reputation intact. How did you steal them with everone watching your line handlers? Simple... You cut out a hole the size of a baseball in either side of a deck slat... A hole that a weighted monkey fist will drop through. Then you put a guy down in the superstructure. When the heavie arrives, a guy behind you steps on the heavie so it passes under the void in front of the heel of his boot. This allows him to move the monkey fist slowly to the hole, where the monkey fist falls through and while you are pulling the mooring line over, the rascal down in the superstructure is reeling in the heaving line which is disappearing down the hole...You can't see what's happening through a limber hole because Mr. 'I'm stealing your heavie' is between the engine air induction and exhaust line. A good heavie stealing team can rip off two every time. When you pass over two and get the...

"Where's the other two?"

You smile and say...

"We tossed 'em over to one of your guys aft."

They usually figure out they've been hornswoggled but are too embarrassed to admit it. Everyone knew we were stealing them, but never figured out how in the hell we were doing it. Adrian Stuke was one devious sonuvabitch.

The statue of limitations on stolen heavies has run out. For those of you having a cold beer and saying to your wives,

"So THAT'S how the bastards were doing it!"

All I can say is, thanks for the memories.