

The After Battery Rat

Volume 9, Issue 2 - Insert. By Dex Armstrong with Permission

May 2008

Route 460

In the old days going north out of the Norfolk area, you didn't have Interstate 64... And Interstate 95 existed only in the minds of futuristic thinkers. You had Rt. 460 and Rt. 17.

460 was as straight as an arrow and had some amazing places to visit. For some reason, boat sailors were partial to 460.

The main reason was Wright's Barbeque. There was this town called Zuni, Virginia... To call it a town is charitable... The "YOU ARE NOW ENTERING ZUNI" and the "YOU ARE NOW LEAVING ZUNI" signs were on the same post. The town consisted of a gas station, a package store (for those of you who live in states where you have private liquor stores - a package store is an Alcohol Beverage Control, or ABC store), a feed store, and Wright's Bar-B-Q.

For miles before you got to Zuni, there were tin signs nailed to trees, fence posts, the sides of barns... Crissakes, if you could see a vertical surface, chances are someone had nailed one of those three little dancing pigs signs on it that read, "WRIGHT'S BAR-B-Q", "MOUTHWATERING PIT COOKED PORK", "10 MILES ON RIGHT".

They weren't lying, either. Guys on the boat would hear the "Set the Maneuvering Watch" word passed, look at their watches, smile and say, "Hell, we can make it to Wrights before the old gals lock the door."

Wrights employed ladies who were very senior citizens... Ladies who had reached the age where they were looking for a little side income to supplement their retirement checks. They wore black dresses with white aprons and had little white lace handkerchiefs pinned in their breast pocket... And, they wore hairnets. In the '50s, folks didn't care for big long hairs showing up in their chow, so the health authorities required that food service people cover their heads. Somewhere, they stopped doing that... With fast food being lukewarm, synthetic cardboard tasting crap, maybe long black waitress hairs have become the most nutritional part of the whole meal.

The old ladies loved us boat sailors... We called 'em 'Sweetheart', and we were all 'Darlin'. We brought them weird presents from places the boat pulled into and we tipped on the level of the Oil Minister of Kuwait. These things probably contributed to our popularity. As I recall, racy lingerie from Smith's in Bermuda was always a big winner. Always had this vision of these old, over-the-hill haypounders out there in the east jeezus boondocks grabbing jumper cables for their pacemakers when granny came dancing into the living room wearing one of those abbreviated black see-through lace numbers. I'll bet old pappy damn near jumped out of his old claw hammer loop big mac overalls. Geriatric sex... The sub force spread a lot of joy.

Wrights made great barbeque... Crackerjack smoked pork. But, they made Bar-B-Q sauce too. Ladies would say, "Darlin', you want mild or hot sauce with that?" If you said "I'll take the hot sauce, you only did it once..."

Those sweet little old ladies had broken the code on vegetable-based napalm. They had invented a liquid you could use for heavy welding... The stuff they put under a sandwich bun could melt the fillings out of your teeth and make you buy asbestos skivvy shorts.

I loved Wrights... It's gone now - all that's left are a couple of faded 3 little pigs signs with peeling paint nailed to trees, spreading the lie that Wright's Bar-B-Q is 10 miles up the road...

There was a roadside peanut stand at Ivor Virginia. Sold giant croaker sacks full of roasted and boiled peanuts. It is amazing what kind of mess four submarine sailors and a 20 pound bag of fresh roasted peanuts can make inside of an automobile... For years after I left the boats, beer bottles and damn peanut shells kept appearing every time I hit the brakes hard.

The woman who operated the peanut stand was a big woman by any standard you could apply. She looked like she had mastered the art of locomotive swallowing... You could set up housekeeping in one of her bra cups.

One night, we kept seeing these billboards that read, "FUMAZONES KILL NEMATODES".

We looked at each other.

"What 'n the hell's a fumazone? And what do they have against nematodes, whatever 'n hell they are?"

We were enlisted non rated, so no one ever accused us of great overwhelming brilliance.

"Sounds like Greek names... Must be some serious stuff between some Greeks..."

We later learned that it was all about some chemical that cured cancer of the peanut root.

Well, being the creative raghats that we were, we invented words like 'fumanazonic physics' and 'nemanatodic compensation'... Words we could work into conversations with old Chiefs who would never admit that they had no gahdam idea what you were talking about.

"Hey Chief, when you went to "A" School, were you good in fumanazonic refractory multi-denominational iambics?"

"Hell yes... But I'm not here to give you ALL the answers... Time you learned the idea behind qualification is for you to go find the answers yourself..."

Not more than 10 minutes later, he'd link up with one of his old barnacle encrusted E-8 buddies..."

"Hey Jack, when you studied for your rate, you have any of that fumanazonic shit?"

Playing Pin-The-Tail on the goat locker was a big part of the fun.

Nobody takes 460 anymore. A lot of old coots died smiling from the Bermuda Garter Belt Cardiac Shutdown phenomena... Damn near nobody left.

Dex