

The After Battery Rat

Volume 3, Issue 2 – Insert. By Dex Armstrong with Permission

May 2002

Enginemen... God's Worst Creation

Did you ever wonder why diesel boat enginemen all live to a hundred and five, and have to be terminated with sledgehammers? The forward and after enginerooms on smokeboats were what the EPA calls hazardous waste sites. They had germs roaming around in there the size of snapping turtles. Any engineman who could survive six months, developed a level of immunity that could stand up to anything below the level of a ground zero nuclear blast.

Take Mike Hemming. In the world of natural selection, Mother Nature would normally provide something that would eliminate something as ornery and socially maladjusted as 'Boy Throttleman'... But if a rattlesnake bit Hemming, the damn snake would die. Why? He was an engineman.

When we ran out of clean coffee cups on Requin, the cooks would send a messcook to the enginerooms to locate, round up and return the vast collection of cups that migrated there and never returned. When enginemen made coffee runs, it was a one-way trip for whatever the coffee went aft in... An engineman will drink coffee out of anything he can pour it into... Cup... Bean can... Band-Aid box... Left boot off a dead yardbird... Didn't matter.

I have collected cups in enginerooms that a cat would have covered up in a litter box. Enginemen identified which cup belonged to which snipe by the patterns of black, greasy fingerprints covering the outside of the cups.

A first class motor mac once handed me a cup containing what had to be a weeks worth of Beechnut chewing tobacco spit roaming around in it.

"Hey kid, when you haul your worthless ass forward, how 'bout a fresh cup."

"Sure... It'll take a couple of minutes to wash out your cup."

Dex Armstrong's Writings

4th in a Series of Demented Writings from DEX

From the Surgeon General:

This is the 4th contribution we've had from Dex Armstrong, aka the "After Battery Rat". As stated to you before, if you find these works "offensive" then you have every opportunity to write to me (see return address on newsletter) or email me (RMBICKEL@STUPP.COM) or even call me (636) 225-7528 and let me know you'd rather me do a "Dex-Ectomy" on your newsletter.

As stated before, Dex was not a member of the Sirago Crew, but rather was aboard the USS Requin – another Pier 22 boat. His stories are unique in that they paint a more colorful picture of what life was really like on those old diesel boats—
Mike



"What for?... Just run some water in to get the chunky stuff out and draw me a fresh one."

'Fresh one' was an alien concept to a gahdam snipe... Just like soap... Razor use... And socially acceptable vocabularies.

Snipes lived in a world never fully understood or appreciated by their shipmates. In a word... They were by far, the weirdest of the weird. I have no idea where the Navy found the sonuvabitches... My guess was they had to turn over a helluva lot of rocks and they just crawled out hauling big tools.

They were the only creatures in any of our armed services who considered acceptable personal hygiene could be achieved by turning your skivvy shirt inside-out every three weeks.

On the plus side, they were, hands down, the least self-absorbed, most generous bastards that ever lived... To them, an empty beer glass was unacceptable. Whatever they saved on soap, blades and laundry money went to pay for rounds of beer and taxi fares to haul drunken shipmates back to D&S piers.

Knowing full well that it is a gross violation of the Torpedoman's Oath to ever say anything positive about anything that ever crawled out of the lower flats on an enginehouse, I... Make that we... All knew that come anything from a bar brawl to a Mother's Day collection, the first three guys in line would be throttlmen and oilers.

By the time Hemming crossed the brow and became one of the 'Great Unwashed' on Requin, Stuke and I had mastered the E-3 survival skills, could operate thirteen-button blues without peeing on the flap and were known as 'The Two Idiots off Requin' by every master-at-arms on Orion. Hemming is called 'Boy Throttleman' because he was operating Fairbanks Morse on Tench boats fifteen minutes after his mom tossed his Cub Scout uniform in the Salvation Army collection box. He was bossing guys old enough to have changed his three-cornered pants... He was studying maintenance manuals when his contemporaries were still reading 'Little Golden Books'.

He took big-time heat, but teenage rock crusher drivers are as scarce as virgins in Little Rock. But he had the beer drinkers' tapeworm and ranked right up there on the enginemen's scuzzy scale... And he was ugly and came with the vocabulary of a sewer digger's cockatoo.

Flo married him... Could have been the victim of post-hypnotic suggestion but she loves the unrepentant rascal. Being married to Flo would redeem the worst sinner and probably did.

