

While I was stationed in San Diego, California, the admiral in command of Naval Surface Forces Pacific created an event for his ships in port featuring nautical contests between crews. This was strictly voluntary, and lasted a week. There was competition in gig races, small sailboat races, knot tying, welding, damage control drills, a tug-of-war, etc.; and there was a sea story contest in the 32nd Street Naval Station theater, which I attended.

After several good stories, a crusty, tattooed old Master Chief Bosun's Mate, coffee mug in one fist, walked on stage and described some aspects of life aboard his first ship, a heavy cruiser in the Atlantic Fleet. He told this story, which I'll try to re-create in his words:

"I been in this man's navy near thirty years, seen lotsa changes. Back when I first joined it wadn't nothin' like ta-day, none a this new-fangled stuff. We dint have none a these modern cun-veen-yen-siz like ya'll got now in the ol' SAINT PAUL, no sirree. I's a Seaman Apprentice in Second Division, 'n alls we ever seemed ta do was holystone them teak decks back by the Quarterdeck. Day in, day out, sixty-five men down on their knees, holystonin' them sacred decks back aft 'til they was snow white.

"Well, I finally got me some Liberty one time, got over ta Nor-fork 'n inta some a that green beer they got over there. Had me a bellyful, 'n then went back ta the ol' SAINT ta sleep it off.

"The Chief, he had us up 'n at them decks first damn thing next mornin', 'n man, I was one hurtin' White Hat! Had me the cramps sump'n fierce from that green beer. But I's hungover, see, slept late 'n missed chow, dint even

have time fer a crap 'fore I had ta git up ta Quarters. So I hadda hang on 'til after 0830 when the c'mpartment cleaners was done inna Head, fore I could take me a dump. Wadn't like tuh-day, no sir, ya dint get nowheres NEAR that Head till they was all done cleanin' it 'n the Cap'n o' the Head, he says it's okay.

"So I's out on deck on muh knees, holystonin' like ever'one else, hurtin' bad. Head hurt, guts hurt, *damn* that ol' green beer! An back in them days when ya worked there weren't no talkin', no talkin' a'tall. Ya kept yer trap shut, 'cause if the Chief er Leadin' Seaman caught ya talkin' he'd find ya some more ta do, after ever-one else was done. Wadn't like it is tuh-day, didn't have no 'rights' ta speak of, 'cept a right to work ya butt off.

"So finally I sees 'em take the chain offa the Head door over on the port side, an I stops holystonin' 'n sticks muh hand up inna air 'n waits fer the Chief ta come over.

"'N he comes on over 'n sez, The hell YOU want, Riley?

"I sez Hey Chief, I gotta go ta Head, I'm in a real bad way.

"'N he sez You git yer ass back to holystonin', dammit, till I say otherwise.

"'N I sez No kiddin' Chief, I gotta go bad! I got me the gripes so hard I'll crap muh pants if'n I cain't get ta the Head!

"Well, he dint like it a bit, but he let me go. He sez, You got FIVE minutes, Riley, you hear me? Five. Then you have your sorry hurtin' ass back here 'n git ta work!

"'N I sez Right Chief, right, five minutes, I'll be back fer sure! 'N I took off runnin' fer the Head.

"Now, back then we dint have none a these fancy crappers the ships got tuh-day, like inna house. Nosir, we had 'em ol' trough shitters, jist a long sheet-metal channel, had flush water comin' in uphill side 'n goin' out downhill, takin' whatever ya dropped in with it. Run salt water flush alla time, off the Fire Main. 'N ever man had his own set a ass-boards hung up with 'is name on it, case someone gits the clap er crabs er sumthin', you dint catch it from 'im.

"So I DOVE in 'at Head, grabbed muh ass-boards down, dropped muh pants 'n set, 'n cah-menced ta doin' muh duty 'n a blessed relief it was, too! Durn near dint make it.

"Maybe a minute later these other two fellas they come in a talkin' ta one 'nother, 'n they git their own ass-boards down 'n sit next ta me, still talkin'. They's not

really takin' a crap, see, they's jist skatin' outta some work detail er other by hidin' back there inna Head.

"Well, alla sudden these two git real quiet, 'n I look up, an there's the ol' Chief standin' there, starin' at us real hard like.

"'N the Chief, he says, Well *NOW*, here's whut ya'll are gonna do: each one a ya'll's gonna reach him some a that shit paper, right now. *DO IT!*

"So we each got us a hunk a shit paper.

"An then the Chief, he says, Now: each a you slackers gonna reach down 'n wipe his ass, 'n then yer gonna hold that shit paper out here whur I kin see it. And any man ain't got shit on that paper, I'm gonna stomp his head flat. *DO IT!*

"Well I know *I'm* okay, 'cause I'm the only one there what's doin' his righteous business 'n ain't jist corkin' off.

"An jist as I go to reach down there, I feel another hand come over 'n *wipe my ass.*"

The laughter and applause were thunderous. The judges didn't wait, either: they declared the Master Chief the hands-down winner, then 'n there.