

Coffee

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Some of this is true!

When I was young, children were not offered coffee. Coffee and liquor were for adults; both bad for growth, health, maturity; we never questioned that logic. Yet our parents and their friends prospered, were wise, consumed both, many to happy excess.

Together Dad and mom would consume a pot of coffee at the evening meal. That began to change for Mom. One Lent, gave up sugar in coffee; never used it again; next year, it was cream, same result. Third year it was coffee itself.

Thence only hot tea.

Dad was not that kind of Catholic. His coffee had to be boiled, the pot brought to the table held by a heavy cloth handle covering, the content still sizzling in the aluminum pot. And he preferred to saucer-and-blow the boiling mix, even though he believed that China's higher Cancer among males was from tea, served really hot, males first.

Time passes. I begin drinking coffee.

In the Navy aboard ship and other isolation, fresh milk, and soda pop becomes a scarce commodity. Every Navy ship has coffee pots galore. It would be uncommon to find one in use for more than a day that might be clean. Boiling the bean unmercifully broke-in the pot. Why start over? These seldom turned off either.

There was no rule that everyone drink coffee, but that became the fact.

Near every pot, a can of condensed milk. Almost as ritual, this was avoided, seldom discoloring the coffee; was often sour, curdled coffee, even when fresh.

Ship crews mingling shore might begin a conversation, then serious dispute, then Shore Patrol-calling brawl, about minutia; never about who had the best or worst coffee. All was bad, absolutely essential, above any fray.

Once under way, Orders determines ship's destiny. Getting there, the Sea determined roll and pitch of the ship. Coffee spills were common, stains everywhere the crew moved. When decks were swabbed-down, that seawater was coffee stained. Navy ships ran on oil; the crew, coffee. Men and ships won battles, coffee at their side.

Every fighting ship was assumed to have an elite Officer corps. Nothing could be further from the truth. That cadre was the smaller Chief Petty Officer group, responsible for everything; had their own Mess, thus coffee pot. You never had Navy coffee, until you had a cup of Joe oozing from their urns. Some days it might be thick enough to slice, then chew during the 4-hour watch. None fell asleep those hours no matter how long sleep had been avoided. It was addictive. When not observed, other shipmates might sneak a cup from the Chief's Mess. Everyone would know; that cup defied whitening afterward.

During WWII in downtown Honolulu, on Nimitz Blvd, the Navy maintained this not so secret weapon. When operating, you could smell it miles away. This was the coffee roasting ovens, supplying each ship, all station further west. No bean was ever underpersecuted. It wasn't that the odor was ugly, it was suffocating. The Navy knew each roast might not be opened in a Mess for a year; their idea, no sailor ought to be expected to fight on a weak cup of coffee. Except with the Cook, blamed for everything unpalatable.

Years later I had the privilege of taking my wife aboard various Navy ships. as guest. She consistently rejected their cup of coffee after a sip, thinking each was that exception, a bad cup of coffee. She never thought I was serious when I complemented the Cook on his coffee.

In these advanced years of reducing consumption of everything, we consume pots of coffee, like it tough. These years Barbara also likes Iced Coffee in a tall glass, year round. It's not just the taste; it's watching the cream glide and sink around the cubes of ice, as if giant white clouds are overwhelming the night, bringing clarity to mind and soul in a dark world of trouble. That's good coffee too.

After drinking Navy coffee for six months, the group of Navy personnel I was with were put under Army command in Japan. Soft living. Clean bed every night, healthy food, comfort and luxury, yet coffee that couldn't fight its way out of a wet paper bag. That difference was drastic.

The Coffee PH of the Pacific Ocean is said to have doubled from 1941-45.