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Allan Lowery's New Bar on 11th at Folsom...

The Leatherneck: The Ultimate Bar of the 70s with Photos by Jim Stewart

by Jack Fritscher

Historical Context Introduction

Written April, 15, 1977, and published in *Drummer* 18, August 1977.

Before I became editor in chief beginning with *Drummer* 19, this was my first actual by-line in *Drummer*, written, coordinated, and produced for my friend and long-time roommate, Allen Lowery, who was opening his San Francisco dream venue, the new USMC-themed bar, the Leatherneck, June 1977; with documentary leather and S&M photographs by my other roommate, Jim Stewart/Keyhole Studio, featuring Leatherneck bartender, Chris Meyrovich, who became my Palm Drive Video model, Sweat MacCloud.

Allen Lowery owned a two-flat home at 15th and Castro where David Sparrow and I lived with him during parts of 1972, 1973, and 1974. Allen Lowery had asked if I had any interest in opening the Leatherneck together as a business, but I was coming off my sabbatical year as an associate professor and beginning my work as a writer at Kaiser Engineers in Oakland, and basically preferred my approach to gay business through writing and photography.

So we had a very interesting time privately staging these promotional Leatherneck photos in a performance before the bar's grand opening, because Allen Lowery made sure his bar was a performance-art set, complete with props, so that customers could spontaneously act out S&M scenes. Chris Meyrovich appears in three photographs including on the cross. The sweet Allan Lowery is pictured profile with beard facing one of his famously beefcake bartenders over a beer bottle on lower right, page 83 in *Drummer*.

In the grand and early tradition of having gay artists create murals for new bars, making them instant folk-art galleries, A. Jay made four huge mural panel-paintings for the Leatherneck. He continued the legacy of artists such as Chuck Arnett who had painted murals for the Tool Box, and Etienne who painted the murals for the Gold Coast bar in Chicago. One of the four panels painted for the Leatherneck by the art-director of *Drummer*, A. Jay, is pictured in the photographs with this article.

Art in Bars: Of course, these core murals by key artists in the bars led bar owners and artists to hang other paintings, drawings, posters, and photographs displayed at revolving intervals. In this way, before gay art galleries existed, huge crowds of men saw a vast amount of art simply by going out to the bars.

Bars as Performance Space: The Leatherneck and the Ambush bar were expansions on the 60s and early 70s ideas of bars as drinking establishments. The Ambush bar, with art work by Chuck Arnett, was, besides being a bar, a practicing leather workshop where leather artists like

Ambush owner, David Delay, created leather gear which patrons, drinking a beer a few feet away, could watch him and his staff create. Among all the “ultimate” bars of the 70s, the Ambush was certainly, with its location on Harrison, rather than Folsom, the best to widen the concept of strict “leather” into the wider classification of the homomascularity of outdoorsmen and bears and more mature men.

While the Leatherneck was the two genres of “leather” and “uniforms,” the Ambush was pitched to a wider, more realistic crowd that embraced the fact that leaving one’s twenties and thirties behind could be gladly celebrated.

The homomascularity Ambush was, in the “art form of a bar,” exactly the demographic I was intending to address in *Drummer*.

Drummer publisher Tony DeBlase, much later, pointed out on page 5 in the *Drummer* 100 editorial, this delicate distinction—that I had stamped *Drummer* with masculinity first and leather second. “Issues 12 through 18,” DeBlase wrote, “were edited by Robert Payne [publisher John Embry], then with *Drummer* 19, Jack Fritscher came upon the scene. Under Jack’s direction, SM per se became less prominent, and rough and raunchy male/male sexuality, often written by Jack himself, became the main theme.” –JF, October 2, 2001

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Historical Context Introduction, Part 2
GUNS AND POISONS:
REVISIONISTS, POLITICS, AND MISTAKES

History, especially the murky origin of gay history, should be as accurate as possible, and protected as an endangered species from the guns and poisons of revisionists. That is my goal in this collection about *Drummer* in which I take occasion to place a reader’s *caveat* that, in 1997, editor Claude Summers published an encyclopedic book, *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage: A Reader’s Companion to the Writers and their Works, from Antiquity to the Present*. At 786 pages, this ambitious book tries to codify gay and lesbian writers with a bit of their biographies and bibliographies incorporated with themes and genres, such as “American Literature: Colonial,” “American Literature: Gay Male, 1900-1969,” “Erotica and Pornography,” “Sadomasochistic Literature,” “Latino Literature,” plus alphabetical entries of individual writers.

A work of this size, written by so many authors, has much to recommend its lists of names and dates. However, my reading of this book causes me to take both historical and scholarly exception to its way-too-many mistakes and errors. Having written for encyclopedias myself, such as the Mapplethorpe entry in the prestigious British encyclopedia, *Index of Censorship* (2002), I am particularly sensitive to accuracy in this genre of books because what is published in them becomes, whether correct or not, set in stone as readers and researchers turn the pages unable to determine what is actually a fact, a mistake, or a political spin on the truth written by a particular author to pump his friends or stab his enemies. Sometimes pure insensitivity causes mistakes.

For instance, Claude Summers so dismisses *Drummer* that, although the magazine is mentioned many times in *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage*, *Drummer* is not listed even once in the index. To me the index of any book gives instant evidence of its depth and integrity. For all the importance of *Drummer* in coaching and publishing beginning writers such as John Preston, Aaron Travis, John Rowberry, and championing many others, this 786 page book lacks a

single page or paragraph explaining anything about *Drummer*. Actually, I was shocked by something personal in the book, which if the superficial take and misinformation is so factually wrong in the instance of the book mentioning my literary work and career history, then how off-key and wrong is it in all its other pages.

Misinformation, and particularly the disinformation of gay politics, both appear on the nicely designed and printed page exactly like accurate information to the casual reader. I always taught my university classes in literary interpretation to be their own best critics, to trust no one telling them the truth about anything, and to look for the vested interest of the writer who is trying to persuade facts and opinions in ways that may not be accurate or true. The ultimate goal of the intellectual life is the ability for one to become an analytical critic of all the misinformation, disinformation, and information printed and broadcast during the course of a lifetime.

In the section titled “Erotica and Pornography,” contributor Edmund Miller, Professor of English and Chair of the English Department at the C. W. Post Campus of Long Island University, who himself is an author of erotic stories, poetry, and scholarly books about seventeenth-century British literature, writes with the typical superficiality that the East Coast gay literary crowd has regarding the depth and complexity of West Coast writing:

“Although he is also known for the experimental cinematic technique of his epic of San Francisco’s Castro district, *Some Dance to Remember* (1990), Jack Fritscher (b.1939) is known primarily as a writer of such short fiction as the stories of *Corporal in Charge of Taking Care of Captain O’Malley* (1984)...Fritscher began his career in pornography as editor of another true confessions magazine, *Man to Man* [sic].” (Pages 263 and 264).

On page 623, Robert Nashak, a doctoral candidate in English at UCLA, a recipient of a Mellon Fellowship in the Humanities and a Fulbright grant, writes in his essay, “Sadomasochistic Literature,” “Some of the best pornographic fiction to come out of the leatherman tradition is by Tim Barrus, whose *Mineshaft* (1984), like Leo Cardini’s *Mineshaft Nights* (1970) before it, describes the sexual exploits of the infamous New York S/M palace of the same name. Phil Andros’ *Different Strokes* (1986) and Jack Fritscher’s *Leather Blues* (1984) and *Stand by Your Man* (1987) are three of the best erotic short story collections in this vein. Larry Townsend is perhaps the most widely read writer of leatherman erotica. His landmark *The Leatherman’s Handbook II* (1989) has received wide circulation and interest.”

These quotes may be just the tip of the iceberg of inaccuracy.

Not to cavil, but to explain, some corrections need to be made on the 67 words of Edmund Miller, and the 95 words of Robert Nashak.

I may be known for my signature novel of gay history, *Some Dance to Remember*, and for my short fiction collections, but I did not begin my career in pornography as editor of a “true confessions magazine, *Man to Man* [sic].” I began my career with my novel, *I Am Curious (Leather)*, written in 1969 and published in 1972, then excerpted in *Son of Drummer*, then serialized with all of its chapters in *Man2Man Quarterly* 1980-1982, and then published again as a book titled *Leather Blues* by Winston Leyland’s Gay Sunshine Press, 1984. In 1977, two years before I invented *Man2Man*, I entered high-profile gay publishing as the Founding San Francisco editor-in-chief of *Drummer*. I developed *Man2Man Quarterly* in 1979 and ran it eight issues for two years, and its title was never *Man to Man*, as Edmund Miller mistakes it, and it was not a “true confessions” genre written by a lot of different and anonymous writers like Boyd MacDonald’s *Straight to Hell*, because *Man2Man Quarterly* was all fiction and features that I

[HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE THIS MATERIAL](http://www.JackFritscher.com/Drummer/Research%20Note.html) www.JackFritscher.com/Drummer/Research%20Note.html

myself wrote continuing the *Drummer* tradition from the 70s into the first 'zine of the 80s.

Also, Edmund Miller fails to note that my anthologies of short fiction are actually collections of my stories that first appeared in gay magazines, particularly *Drummer*, where they were read every thirty days or so in each mass-market issue by thousands more readers than ever bought the books which have sold steadily through the years. Edmund Miller's failure to mention *Drummer* as the source of this pop culture magazine fiction is an intellectual mistake of the kind that is usually caused by academic analysts who worship books but dismiss magazine culture.

A pop culture fact that is worthy of note: *Drummer's* press run in the 70s, according to publisher John Embry, was 30,000 to 40,000 copies, which means that multiplied by the pass-along average to two other readers besides the original purchaser of the magazine, each *Drummer* issue was read by 90,000 to 120,000 gay men monthly. No gay book has ever enjoyed such statistics.

While I thank Robert Nashak for his assessment, because he is analyzing "Sodomasochistic Literature" as a genre, he might have deepened the information in his short sentences by mentioning that Tim Barrus was one of *Drummer's* best editors in the 80s during the time he wrote *Mineshaft*. Tim Barrus, always my friend, became my champion and hero, because after creating the "Leather Lit Writers Series" in San Francisco venues like A Different Light bookstore, when he left *Drummer* to work with publisher Elizabeth Gershman at Knights Press, he handed her my manuscript of *Some Dance to Remember*. Elizabeth Gershman wrote me an acceptance letter that said, "I'd fucking kill to publish your novel."

In short, Robert Nashak—just as Matthew Parfitt in his essay gay "War Literature" omits all my erotic war stories including the Vietnam aspects of *Some Dance to Remember*—rather too glibly skips over the sodomasochistic literature of "The Gay Renaissance of the 1970s," by placing another *Drummer* author, Phil Andros with *Different Strokes* in 1986 when Phil Andros, the grandfather of gay erotica, had famously been widely published since the 1950s, and was revived in *Drummer* in the 1970s.

Robert Nashak also takes a wrong-genre belly flop when he lists my novel *Leather Blues* as a short story collection—which it is not. His commendation of Larry Townsend is well taken except for Nashak's confusion that Larry Townsend's landmark book is *The Leatherman's Handbook II* (1989) when actually Larry Townsend's landmark book was *The Leatherman's Handbook* published seventeen years before, very early on in 1972.

Time-lines and facts are difficult when analysts skim the surface, but accuracy must be the job and goal of the historian and critic. That is why this book of *Drummer* exists with the original articles, boldly dated, with introductions that clarify the context and verify the back story of people, places, and events that surround these historical *Drummer* documents which give a time-capsule eye into the history of our gay art and culture. – © Jack Fritscher, October 24, 2001

**The feature article as published in
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Allan Lowery's New Bar on 11th at Folsom...

**The Leatherneck:
The Ultimate Bar of the 70's
with Photos by Jim Stewart**

by Jack Fritscher

San Francisco's Leatherneck Bar ain't your ordinary meat-rack tavern. [Reference to Tim Buckley's then hugely popular album, *Welcome to L. A.*, which would be a "textural" album to listen to while reading this feature article—to experience an audio-erotic and emotional evocation of that time.] Sure the 'Neck's a beer bar with wall-to-wall shitkickers, but upfront macho ain't no pose. Come night time, the right time, dudes head for the Leatherneck like an accident about to happen. Hot, man. Not a Lacoste alligator in the joint. A High Place.

About as high, in fact, as the elevated platform at the USMC Recruit Depot seems to 80 sock-footed jarheads sweating at attention, looking up as some 6-4, 245-pound DI's bootlace level.

GET THE PICTURE?

Hardass cruising. Like two-fisted combat at the USMC Depot where some little shaved-head boots is gonna be ordered for the first time in his life to take on another man with his bare hands. Palms and 'pits running sweat, man. Breathing hard. Crotch soaking his USMC jock.

Ain't that an OK fantasy walk into the Leatherneck!

Your eyes trip on the black leather. Your ears trip on the country-western wail. And your feet trip on the cleated boots standing toe to toe, crotch to crotch. Having a heatwave, man.

The Leatherneck's a "ball" room rotten to the Corps. Leather nights at 11th and Folsom are like the contact classes the USMC calls "Physical Instruction with Vigor." Outside, the big bikes and heavy pickup trucks are parked. *Waiting*. Inside, any little disciplinary problems with a dude and you bet his buddies strap him down to the fastest bondage rack in town. Brig rats are a house specialty, stretched out in full leather, secured up on a cross six feet above the bar. That's how the Leatherneck does a social "security" number.

A NOTE TO PUSSYCATS

But don't worry is you're down there on your first visit. You're safe. Heh. Heh. The action is totally consenting. S and M at the Leatherneck means, above all, Sensuality and Mutuality. The only thing that happens is what you want to happen.

MAN TO MAN

Shoulder to shoulder, dudes get bolder, hanging around the smokey back bars, shooting pinballs where guys with pinned balls score high. The front bar at the Leatherneck is long. The layout is laid-back into a maze of rooms with something for everyone. By midnight's wee bitching hour, pool balls are hitting hard in the side pockets. Guys in leather harnesses are eyeballing husky uniformed types whose handcuffs are gonna click-rasp down cold around the wrists of some very willing cowboy.

Drop your beer change on the floor and you go down to your knees to pick it up like a drowning man for the third time. A lifetime flashes by of piss-ripped denim, jockstraps, Crisco-ed leather, oiled chests rippling under pec-tailored vests, sweaty abdominal exposed through torn-off Leatherneck teeshirts, biceps banded with studs, cod-pieced chaps in chaps, thick belts, and boots of 1001 knights waiting for tongue-shine, and headed for the long porcelain trough in the back room.

When/if you come up for air/amyl, you know this ain't Alice's Restaurant. It's Allan Lowery's Basic Training Room. The Leatherneck has hot murals by A. Jay. It has oiled pecs and a yard of cock shared by four of the hottest barmen on the Coast. The Leatherneck ain't exactly fantasy. The Leatherneck trip is real.

Bar none, the Leatherneck is San Francisco's ultimate bar of the 70's.

The other night, at the christening of A. Jay's second of four murals, one of those green-fatigue type DI's was running a small conversation back in a dark corner on two muscled dudes of lesser leather rank.

"Choke 'im, fucker," the DI said to his recruit who was a tit too "gentle" with the man whose chest he was mauling on command. He rubbed the USMC tattoo on his forearm. (USMC tattoos get you discounts at the bar.) Like the Leatherneck itself, this leatherneck DI was the real thing. About thirty. Himself recent Marine meat. He still liked drilling. Especially after sundown. "Back at my playroom, I'll show you two what you do after you pin your man down."

A small part of the Leatherneck crowd circled tight in on this close encounter—to watch.

"First, you dropkick the fucker.

"Sir, yessir," the blond recruit whispered back.

"That's the real way. 'Course the way we're gonna play it," and the large man in the USMC fatigues put his sweat-ringed arms around his two boys, "is gonna be a little bit different." And he walked them out the Leatherneck door, past Bill [Essex], the heavy-chested bouncer, who smiled after this good threeway match made in the heaven of the Leatherneck.

ANYPLACE IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT

So at the Leatherneck, you can love 'em tender, and you can love 'em nice and easy. But if [like Tina Turner] you "never do nothin; nice and easy," the Leatherneck's for sure your happy hunting ground. Because it ain't no statue bar, man. S&M don't mean Stand and Model. The Leatherneck means action.

At the Leatherneck, men celebrate being men.

Ain't nowhere else quite like Lowery's Leatherneck. It ain't a bad little nightspot for about 500 guys in a little 7-mile by 7-mile fishing village called San Francisco.

For a celebration of male-hide and for close encounters of the leather kind, try it.

Weeknights 8-2. Weekends 2-2.

Man alive! © 1977 and 2003 Jack Fritscher

Post Script. Historical Note: Artists Circling *Drummer*

In *Drummer* 18 are nineteen photographs shot for my “Gay Jock Sports” feature by my travel-companion Gene Weber of MM [name deleted for internet], a long-time pal of Allan Lowery. I took MM, who was a resplendent S&M top to see one of my favorite films, Alessandro Jodorowsky’s *The Holy Mountain*. I had so built him up for the gas-mask and castration scene in the outdoor army compound commanded by Acton that he passed out in the first row of the Ghiradelli Cinema.

Gene Weber and I traveled together to Japan in 1975 and played at a very private house of bondage deep inside Tokyo where the bondage masters remembered—all too well—World War II. Gene Weber was a genius photographer whose home on Buena Vista Park West featured a very wide-screen and twelve interconnected projectors that thrilled invited audiences. Gene Weber photographed the red-headed Russell Van Leer and me in a famous San Francisco playroom in a series of 35 millimeter color stills which at the time were titled *Blood Crucifixion*.

As editor in chief of *Drummer* I published a couple of Gene Weber’s famous underwater fisting photographs shot on one of our trips to the Cayman Islands. To practice our snorkeling in our wet suits before we left, we used the pool at the bar at 11th and Folsom which became the Leatherneck. Upon Gene Weber’s death, his photographs were donated to the Gay and Lesbian Archives, San Francisco.

The advertising manager listed on the masthead of *Drummer* 18 is Colt model, Bob Rose, whom I shot as a model in the Palm Drive Video, *Dave Gold’s Gym Workout*. Of the artists listed on the masthead, Cliff Raven of Chicago inked my tattoo; and the artist Skipper provided his own drawings for one of my artist-series videos, *The Skipper Video Gallery: Soldiers, Gladiators, and Barbarians to Die For*, 2002. © 2003 Jack Fritscher