



LCT-81 LANDS AT KISKA

Douglas J. Swanson - EM2c

Me and another fella were on bow watch one night when I looked down into the water and saw a periscope. I remember thinking, "Oh my God, a periscope right in the middle of this convoy!" Then all of a sudden it dawned on me, "That ain't no periscope, it's a paravane", a device that the ship ahead of us was pulling as a guide for other vessels to keep their proper distance. What a relief. . .

North To Alaska

After amphibious training at Camp Carrabelle on Florida's Gulf Coast, we were assigned to the LCT-81 at New Orleans, loaded on the deck of the LST-19. In June of 1943 we were ordered to Alaska, of all places.

I remember going through the Panama Canal and tossing out the rotten potatoes while on mess cook detail on the LST. I was always looking for other electricians and one EM gave me a tour of the sub base and his submarine.

After taking on supplies at San Diego and San Francisco in July, we headed up the inland waterway to Kodiak in the Aleutians, where they had wooden sidewalks! Our LCT-81 was launched from the LST near Kodiak Island on July 28th and soon formed up with the convoy headed for the far Aleutian Island of Kiska. Our forces had retaken Attu back in May where they met with stiff Jap resistance. The main Jap defense was at Kiska and we expected over 5,000 defenders there to put up a big fight.

The convoy included Americans and Canadians and we were cruising through terrible foggy conditions most of the time. Me and another fella were on bow watch one night when I looked down into the water and saw a periscope. I remember thinking, "Oh my God, a periscope right in the middle of this convoy!" Then all of a sudden it dawned on me, "That ain't no periscope, it's a paravane", a device that the ship ahead of us was pulling as a guide for other vessels to keep their proper distance. It had left a wake very similar to a submarine's periscope. What a relief!

The Landing

The amphibious landing took place early on August 15 and the LCT-81 was one of the first boats into the main Japanese Base Camp in Kiska Harbor. Just before we landed, other smaller boats had established the landing beaches with colored flares. I recall the LCT-82 being in the same area as us. We would often get

together with their crew and play poker. They seemed like our "sister ship" even later in the Central Pacific.

Our skipper, Ensign Pat Cooney, had given two of us M-1 rifles and ordered us to lie on the either side of the bow as we went in. I had never fired one of the damned things and didn't know how to reload it if I *did* fire! Lucky for us the landing was unopposed as the entire Jap force had been secretly evacuated weeks earlier. When the crew went up into the hills to look around, we found all sorts of foxholes and defensive positions ready for us. I think if the Japs had stayed to defend Kiska, I would have been a goner.

Another landing took place the same time on the other side of Kiska. That force made it's way across the 4 mile width of the island and met up with the Army on our side at Kiska Harbor. The Japanese had a Sea Plane and Mini Sub Base in the main harbor. We were able to scout around and examine all they had left behind. The island was a souvenir hunters paradise. In their haste to evacuate, the Japs had left behind almost everything in the way of supplies and heavy equipment.

Duty At Kiska

Frenchie (GM Joseph Briere) had found a machine gun on its tripod when an officer came by and told him to stay and watch it while he went to get help so *he* could take it. As soon as the officer was out of sight, Frenchie high-tailed it back to our LCT and stowed the gun onboard. He sold it for \$75 back at Mare Island for some drinking money for us.

Our guys built an airstrip and I remember watching the P-38s come in real low and seeing the contrails. We spent most of our 3 weeks there snooping around for souvenirs when we were not actually transporting supplies from the Merchant ships to shore. The weather was miserable, foggy and damp all the time we were there. At night we stayed on board the LCT and I remember having to put my clothes under my mattress so they would be dry in the morning.