



During one trip to shore with supplies, our Motor Mechanic, J.W. Brown, gave the Army guys quite a scare. Skipper would sit up on top of the pilothouse with a megaphone and give the orders down into the pilothouse—so many rpm's. The Army guys were sitting on a large stack of crated supplies on the beach and as the LCT came in, of course, it created a wave of water. J.W. said to us, "Watch this, guys". He had to have it at full throttle as the soldiers saw this mountain of water coming straight at them. When it hit those crates they exploded like a bomb going off and skipper yells, "How fast were you going, J.W.?" His reply was something to the effect that he was going the rpm's that had been ordered. Skipper always trusted J.W. so he never really brought it up again.

Another day I was on watch while we were under way in the harbor through a heavy fog when the skipper told us to keep a sharp watch out for the sunken Japanese ship in the area. Just then, through the fog, I could make out one mast to port and one to starboard. We had cruised right over the sunken ship just like kicking a field goal! The other man on watch and I decided it best not to report it.

Our food was not as bad as the Army had to put up with but we did have a large load of "overseas hams" piled on the deck under a tarp. These things tasted awful and nobody wanted to touch them. One day the skipper informed the crew that he had been keeping count and suspected someone was stealing them! We were told to keep a sharp lookout on night watch. To the G.I.s onshore these things must have been a treat. On midnight watch you would spot a couple of dark forms sneaking onboard and making off with several hams. We always just looked the other way!

At one point we were ordered to proceed north to the Pribilof Islands which have to be one of the most desolate and lonely places on earth. The weather was very foggy and rough—we had to keep the engines running to keep from broaching on the beach.

We were transporting U.S. equipment from the base there to islands in the Aleutians. The Japanese had never occupied the Pribilofs. Not much there except seals!

In early September, the Navy brass came to us and offered the crew of the LCTs two choices: either agree to stay in the Aleutians for 18 months and then go stateside with no further overseas duty (no matter how long the War lasted)—or get out before the freeze and take your chances with a new assignment. Every one of us on the 81 said, "just get us the hell outta here." In six weeks we found ourselves bound for Tarawa.

The Storm

On our return voyage back to California, all the LCTs had to be towed by the LSTs because there were no facilities anywhere in the Aleutians to hoist them back up onto the LST deck.

We left the Aleutians early in September and ran into a terrible storm on the 9th that lasted for 3 days. The waves would go completely over the LCT as it was being towed. Our LCT would ride the waves like a toboggan on the big swells. The cable would slack off at times and then as the LST would lunge ahead, the cable would pull taught and jerk us forward.

All the LCT crews stayed onboard their boats and every hour someone had to go up on deck and check the cleats that were holding the tow lines, as if we could have done anything had they come loose. Going up through the hatch one time I hit my head and took a nasty bump, our only "casualty" from the Kiska trip.

I talked with lots of sailors who had been in the North Atlantic and they all said that the North Atlantic had nothing over the North Pacific for storms and rough seas. We lost two LCTs (71 and 366) in that storm and back in Frisco we heard that the Destroyers had used one for target practice. How they ever got the crews off them is a mystery to me but all were saved. It's a miracle that we all were not lost!

About a week later we finally made it back to Oakland and left the LCT up a little channel that was used for pleasure boats. While it was being re-fitted, we spent one day scraping barnacles at the Navy shipyards for a buck an hour. When we asked the foreman if he had any more work he said no but that if one of us came in each morning and punched us all in and then out again in the afternoon, he'd pay us for a week! Guess the Government paid for that one.

After a 3-week leave, the LCT-81 (on the LST-213) headed out for duty in the Gilberts and Marshalls.

