



LCT-323 IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

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We soon had our baptism of fire. Fortunately for us there were large ships in the area which were the targets and our little LCT escaped without even a close call. Nevertheless, we learned in a very short time what real war was.

Early in November 1942, we had been at war almost a year. I had been in the Navy for ten months and was assigned to LCT-323. We had been preparing for several weeks to go to the area of the war action. Departure date arrived and late afternoon on 23 November 1942 at 4 p.m. -- that was the Monday before Thanksgiving. The *Juan Cabrillo* weighed anchor and sailed outbound from San Francisco harbor westbound under sealed orders, with the 323 secured on its deck. Where we would end up was anybody's guess. We watched as the San Francisco skyline slowly faded in the twilight behind us and realized that many months would pass before we would again see the coast of the U.S.A.

Japanese submarines had already come close to the California coast. The first few nights I slept partially dressed just in case of an attack and an abandon ship would be ordered. The *Juan Cabrillo* began a zig zag course soon after leaving port and kept it up for several days. Day after day after day we watched the ocean slip slowly by. We did not have anything to occupy our time, except sit and talk about what the next few months might bring. Cruising speed of the ship was only nine or ten knots. That is about ten and one-half miles per hour.

A few days out of port, we were assigned duty as lookout for any suspicious aircraft or other ships. Our crew was assigned the segment of ocean off the starboard side of the ship from midship to the fantail or stern, a ninety degree section of ocean. Other units aboard were assigned the other three ninety degree segments so that the entire area around the ship was covered.

We had a vantage point where we sat and with binoculars and scanned the horizon and the sky. During one day of my watch I heard a voice suddenly yelled, "Siebenmorgen, what kind of plane is that"? It was our skipper. His voice was raised and he spoke rapidly. There was concern in his voice. If the object in ques-

tion were indeed a plane, it was the first one I had seen that flapped its' wings like a bird.

"It's a bird, Sir."....."Oh," he replied.

CROSSING THE LINE

The ship continued on the assigned course as did the security lookout watches. In a few days we had arrived at the point on the globe that had special significance to mariners. It was 3 December 1942. We had crossed the Equator or in mariners terms it was crossing the line. There are six such locations around the globe.

In keeping with the tradition of the sea that event does not pass without proper ceremony, All those who cross the Equator for the first time must be duly initiated into King Neptune's Domain. Even though we were at war this momentous occasion would be observed according to the tradition of all good mariners. None of us first timers, *Polywogs*, had any idea what to expect. There was a hint when the rumor circulated that an officer had been dressed in a Peacoat, at the Equator, and sent aloft to the crows nest with two coke bottles for binoculars to perform lookout duty.

Shortly after lunch all us *Polywogs* were assembled near a quickly rigged throne where King Neptune would preside. The old Gent appeared at the stern of the ship as if he had suddenly emerged from the briny deep. In some loud voice his arrival and presence was announced along with his court attendants. He took his position and in groups of five or six the *Polywogs* had to kneel before His Majesty to be examined, judged, and assigned appropriate punishment.

I was the last in line of one of the groups. The carnival atmosphere seemed a bit amusing to me and I was smiling. I would soon regret that. Then I heard a voice say, "He thinks it is funny, wipe that smile off your face."