

Very obediently with one hand I made the motion of wiping the smile off my face. In doing so, I burst into laughter. That was a mistake as well as improper conduct because at the same time I was hit beside my head. The weapon, I think was an old sock stuffed with rags. It did not hurt but it sure did get my attention. With that His Majesty issued my punishment, "You have to see the dentist." Now how could he know if I had any dental problems? We were told to stand up and take our punishment. I had taken only a few steps when one of the attendants said, "Open your mouth." Still not having quite wised up to the flavor of the activities, obligingly opened my mouth wide. What a mistake. My mouth was quickly filled with something that was horrible. I think it was gunk that had been saved when they cleaned the galley. There are no words in the English language (or any language) except profanity, to describe it. All that I could do was to spit and sputter profusely. What an awful mess.

At the same time we were shoved into a tank of water. When we got out of there all of us were a slimy mess. Trying to clean up with salt water shower was not easy. Salt water and soap do not mix. That ordeal qualified everyone to be Shellbacks.

The lookout duty resumed as the *Juan Cabrillo* kept steaming. In a few more days it arrived at another point of special significance. We crossed the International Date Line. This event was not observed with any fanfare or ceremony. However, having crossed this imaginary line in the ocean qualifies me to be a member of the **Imperial Domain of the Golden Dragon**. A very important society, I might add.

There is only a calendar adjustment at this point. When the International Date line is crossed from East to West a day is skipped. When crossing from West to East the day is repeated. That is to say if some one tells you that he will see you the second Tuesday of next week, that would be possible by crossing the International Date line on Tuesday going from West is the East.

During the entire voyage we never saw any other object or ship. It all was very lonesome being out there by ourselves. On second thought it was safer that way. The remainder of the trip passed without any other excitement. A few days before Christmas 1942, the ship arrived in Noumea, New Caledonia. That was on the 16th or 17th of December. A couple days out before arriving in Noumea an airplane flew around to assess our status. Dry land sure did look good to me again.

I have some photos to verify some of the activities occurring during the crossing. Thanks to our violation of orders banning cameras. Life would be very dull if there was no disobedience. New Caledonia was at that time a French possession. At one time it was a penal colony where France sent some of its life term criminals to serve the rest of their lives.



LIFE IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

War is hell. LCT-323 and the crew arrived in Noumea, New Caledonia a few days before Christmas 1942. New Caledonia was a French Penal Colony and most of the inhabitants were French origin. Many if not all of them were descendants of French Prisoners who had been sent there from France to serve their sentences. The war had cut the supply routes to those islands and all consumer goods were in very short supply. The huge influx of American military there added to the problem. There were many bare shelves in the few stores that were there.

New Caledonia supplied much of the world's supply of nickel. That was the only industry on the Islands. Even that had been curtailed by the War. One of our crew members, Raoul Martin, was of French descent. He claimed two places as his home--Montreal, Canada, and Woonsocket, Rhode Island. He originally came from Montreal. Being of French origin he soon was known as Frenchy, who felt right at home in Noumea. He spoke fluent French--the language in New Caledonia. Every time anyone went into the town, Frenchy went also to act as spokesman and translator. A group of us were in Noumea one Sunday and were trying to find a restaurant that could serve us. All the restaurants we found could not accommodate us because of the shortage of supplies. Frenchy was an aggressive negotiator and convinced the proprietor of the Hotel that we were all officers and they had to serve us. We had a good seven course dinner only because we had Frenchy to talk for us.

FRENCHY AND THE LAUNDRY

We soon learned that Frenchy could provide some very humorous moments. He had worked several years in a pharmacy and his principle interest was medicines and first aid. If anyone suffered just a small scratch, he was willing to give the situation his full attention. He took charge of all the medical supplies that we had. He was not much of a deck hand, but he did a first class job being the ship's doctor.