

On those small boats, there were no facilities for doing laundry. That was a big problem. Everyone had to do his laundry by hand in a bucket. That was a no fun job. One day we were tied up along side a repair ship for some needed repairs. While there, the skipper wanted Frenchy for something, but he was not to be found. The skipper was very unhappy and was ready to sentence him to thirty days in the brig. After the passage of several hours we saw Frenchy coming down the passage way of the repair ship carrying something. When he came aboard he showed us the object and related how he had negotiated getting the device made. It was a replica of prehistoric Maytag Washer, He had talked the crew on the repair ship into making one of those old fashioned clothes stompers so that we could do our laundry much easier.

Even though a short time before the skipper was unhappy with Frenchy's absence, his anger immediately disappeared when he saw what Frenchy had acquired. Now people think that automatic washers are great. Try changing from a bucket to a clothes stomper, that is progress. I have a couple of them now just in case the power goes off.

GUADALCANAL

We left New Caledonia early in January 1943. Our destination was Guadalcanal. That was a long and rough trip. Top speed for our LCT was six knots. The weather was rough part of the way and everyone experienced a severe case of seasickness. There is no worse feeling than an acute case of seasickness. It is best described as feeling like you will die, but afraid that you won't. There is no possible way to get any relief. After three or four days most people will overcome it. However, there are those rare few who never get accustomed to the rough sea. Our cook, Albert Roberts, Robbie or Cookie, was one of those.

Every time we got underway and if the sea was even a little rough, Robbie would get sick. Even so he never missed preparing every meal for the rest of the crew. He kept a bucket beside him in case he had to heave and managed to cook our chow. Everyone really appreciated the stamina of our cook. As soon as we were in smooth water he would be fine.

I do not remember the distance from New Caledonia to Guadalcanal. It took several days to cover the distance. Therefore, I am guessing that the distance is 1000 or 1200 miles. We were in sight of land most of the time, there being a string of islands most of the way. We did not bother to identify the islands as I recall. Those islands provided a view that reminded me of life on a farm back in Kansas. It was clear that what was growing were in rows like corn fields back home, but I had no idea what it was. When we arrived at our destination, the mystery was cleared up--those rows of growth were all coconut palm trees. The islands were possessions of England, and dried coconut was their cash crop--thousands of acres of them.

The battle for Guadalcanal was an all out effort to stop the Japanese advance any closer to Australia Early in 1943 there were fierce battles on Guadalcanal and the day we arrived there we were greeted by a big Japanese air raid. 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. There were eleven very scared people aboard that little LCT, and quite possibly there was some emergency laundry to take care of following the air raid. I think everyone was so shook up to even talk about it after it was over. I said that war is hell.

Our base of operation was about twenty miles north of Guadalcanal on Mocombo Island. Mocombo is a tiny island very near Tulagi which is not very big either. Neither is shown on the map. Mocombo is no larger than a city square block. It took only a few minutes to walk completely around it. The PT boats had a base there also. I'm sure that John Kennedy's PT 109 operated there but I do not recall any of the boat numbers. Tulagi is larger than Mocombo, but less than a mile across. There was a very good harbor there and some of the larger ships came in there. On 7 June 1943, the Japanese paid us a surprise visit at Tulagi harbor. They were pretty successful. They sank an oil tanker, severely damaged a destroyer and sank a New Zealand Corvet, a small ship. We watched it go down in less than five minutes. Fortunately there was only one casualty The bomb went down the smoke stack, we could see it all, and blew the bottom out of the Corvet. No possible way to save it. Even though it was at the height of the war there were humorous moments as well as very serious ones. At our base on Mocombo there was a quay where we could tie up. It was quite narrow, wide enough for only one LCT. Any others had to tie up along side the one tied to the quay.

We were the boat tied to the quay and there was another LCT on our starboard, right side. Our ramp was down so that we could walk off on to land. The crew from the other LCT had to come onto our LCT to go on the island. I was out on deck when the skipper of the other LCT came aboard and crossed over to his boat. A few minutes later he came back aboard again. That time he was soaked from head to foot. He said nothing as he walked by but he had a very sheepish grin on his face. Apparently for some reason he had decided to go ashore again. In doing so he had walked off the front of his own LCT, the ramp also being down, into ten feet of water without being cognizant of where he was or what he was doing. I am sure that last step will be long remembered, it was a wet one. I think that only he and I were aware of that little episode.

