

60 YEARS AGO

Kiska in the Aleutians - August 1943

After the bloody fighting on Attu in May, Allied forces expected an even bigger fight on nearby Kiska which had been heavily fortified by the enemy. More planning went into the Kiska invasion and an even larger force was deployed in August to retake the island. A pre-invasion bombardment took place on 22 July and, totally undetected by the Allies, the entire Japanese force of over 5,000 was evacuated under cover of darkness and fog!

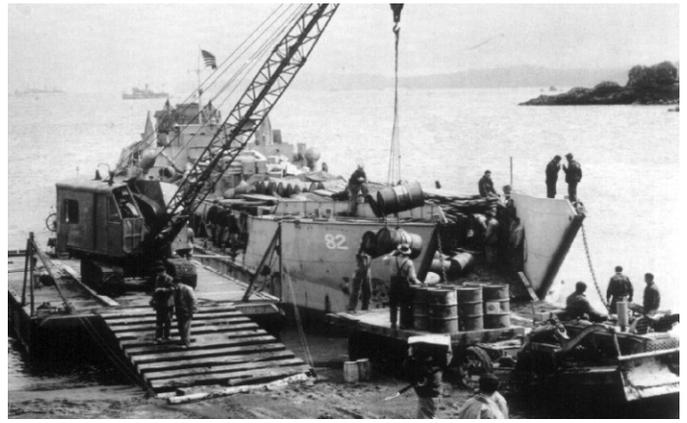
Meanwhile the U.S. and Canadian forces deployed a clever ruse involving several landings with PT boats disguised as troop transports off Gertrude Cove, while the real invasion took place on 15 August on the west side of Kiska Island.

A total of 19 LCTs, all Mk5s, along with LSTs and LCIs participated in this action. These amphibians helped deliver the men of the 1st Special Service Division who moved across the narrow 4 mile width of the island only to find the enemy camp deserted save for three hungry but friendly dogs. This same unit would get their chance at real combat five months later at Anzio, Italy.

LCTs Land at Salerno in September

By September of 1943 Italy had joined the Allies after several minor landings on the "toe" of the mainland. As a prelude to Salerno, several interesting operations were suggested including a plan to parachute troops into Rome and send in supplies up the Tiber River on LCTs! This plan was canceled. Admiral Cunningham did hold back 48 LCTs bound for Britain to be used for Salerno and others were diverted ferry service to help load supplies.

Prior to the landings, ammunition and fuel of all kinds had been accumulating in Sicilian ports and it would be the job of the LCTs and LSTs to get these to Salerno. The Germans mounted several air attacks on the convoys headed to Salerno on 8 September 1943. A slow convoy of American LCTs suffered some damage by these Luftwaffe fighters. LCT-624 was hit and sunk north of Sicily.



LCT(5)-82 is unloaded at Kiska on 15 August, 1943 after the unopposed Allied landings. The formidable Japanese occupation force had evacuated the island weeks earlier. Some 20 Mk-5 LCTs were involved.

Heavy gunfire at Paestrum in the American sector prevented 6 tank-laden LCTs from landing at Blue Beach. Four of the six were hit by 88mm shell. Ensign S.J. Cavallaro who was guiding the formation from LCT-244 was hit by gunfire and killed and the tank nearest the bow started to burn. The crew promptly lowered the ramp and shoved the tank overboard. The LCTs retired out of range, awaited orders and started in again about noon with gunfire support from a destroyer, and at 1330 discharged their tanks on Beach Red.

By afternoon, Beach Red was very congested and the landing craft crews, exhibiting fine discipline and seamanship, helped to bring order to the beachhead. This is commendable considering that only 16 of the 54 LCTs promised for the Attack Force actually turned up on D-Day!

On 11 Sept. the Liberty ships began arriving with more troops, vehicles and supplies. The SS James Marshall was hit by a guided bomb while discharging supplies to an LCT. A large number of Merchant Marines and soldiers were killed as a result of this attack. The LCT survived.

LCTs in the British sector also saw much action and suffered the loss of 5 boats at Salerno. The Germans put up a stiff resistance and the beaches were not secured until the 12 Sept. Even then, a vigorous counteroffensive on the 14th set the Allies back once again. After Salerno the islands of Corsica and Sardinia were taken by the Allies as well as the Italian port of Naples.