ADAK - 275 Square Miles of Wonderment
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I left Aerographer's Mate Class A School, Lakehurst, New Jersey around the middle of November, 1953. Graduates selected their new duty stations according to their standing in the class. As 10th in a class of 60, I had what some would call good pickings, and I could have opted for shore duty in the continental U.S. I was looking for a more adventurous tour, however, and when my turn to pick came up, I was the first of six who selected Fleet Weather Central, Kodiak, Alaska.

After some leave en-route in my home state of Wisconsin, a few days after the Thanksgiving holiday, I made my way to St. Paul, MN where I met another of the six who were heading for Kodiak, and we boarded the Great Northern Empire Builder, coach class. Riding that train across the northern tier of states gripped in the throes of an early winter was already an adventure and we had a nice crossing, arriving in Seattle about 38 hours after leaving St. Paul. I faulted the railroad schedulers because we left St. Paul at night, woke up next morning staring out the coach windows at a bleak winter snowscape, and it stayed that way all day. As night fell, we were in Western Montana and about to get into a scenic part of the trip, but not much scenery can be appreciated at night. By the time daylight came again, we were rolling southward along the shore of Puget Sound, between Everett and Seattle. In Seattle we reported to the Naval Receiving Station, Pier 91, where I was to quickly learn what life is like for a non-rated transient sailor. The word going around was that everyone destined for Kodiak would be there for about five days, then bussed to McChord Air Force Base, Tacoma, WA for a flight to Kodiak. To keep us occupied, we non-rateds were assigned mess cooking duty. My first day of mess cooking the mess deck master-at-arms asked if there was anyone around who could talk to these French sailors. The United States had sold or given some surplus WWII ships to France and the crews were on hand to learn about their ships. They were using our galley, and the Mess Deck Master-At-Arms wanted someone to explain to them what to do with their plates and tools when they finished eating. I was sufficiently skilled in the French language to do what he needed, and as far as I was concerned, once done, that was the end of it. Not so. That was the beginning of my being called FRENCHY for the rest of my naval career, which had 29 ½ years to go.

My second day of mess cooking, the Master-At-Arms said he needed some volunteers for a different detail. The warning about never volunteering for anything buzzed around my head, accompanied by the thought "What could be worse than mess cooking?" I decided the answer to that was "Nothing" and was the first to join the new detail. The guy who started calling me "Frenchy" joined up also. We ended up living in a little bunk house out on the wharf, and our duties were to cast off the mooring lines of departing ships and haul in the heaving lines of those arriving, from Piers 90 and 91. There probably averaged two events per day - one departure and one arrival. I knew I had made a good choice when I opted out of mess cooking for that detail.

Drafts were posted from time to time, but my name was never on one. Then one day my name did appear, on a draft for ship transport to Kodiak, leaving Pier 91 on 20 December. At that point, I had spent 16 days in Seattle and had never seen the sun. It rained, lightly, but there was never any clearing. On the evening of the 19th of December a group of us sailors boarded the U.S.S. Thomas Jefferson (APA -63) and on the morning of the 20th were standing out to sea

through the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Around noon we entered the Pacific Ocean and by mid-afternoon I was seasick. I learned that I could stay reasonably well by sitting in the forward gun tub and keeping my eyes fixed on the horizon. Darkness found me still there, unable to see the horizon, but at least not vomiting. I hung out in the gun tub until bed time, then I loosened my shoe strings, got all outer apparel ready for quick discard, and headed for my berthing space. It was several decks down, just below the waterline, and as far forward as one could be without sleeping in the chain locker. I negotiated the ladders at high speed and made it to my bunk before the squeamishness returned. Then I slept, well enough, and next morning reversed the procedure. I got mostly dressed without standing up, popped my shoes on, and started climbing. By the time I broke out on the weather deck, the squeamishness was returning, and I made straight for the gun tub, where I spent the day. Sometime late in the day I gave in to the pangs of hunger and decided to risk putting a little food in my stomach. It was very little, and I barely made it back to the gun tub without throwing up. By the third morning I felt fine, and went to the galley for a good breakfast. I still spent the day up on deck, lots of times in the gun tub because it was out of the wind, but I was doing fine. We were in something of a storm and this 562-foot troop transport really got a ride. When the bow crashed down, the screw would come out of the water, and spinning freely in the air, caused the stern to shake. Then the bow would come up, quickly it seemed, and it was like riding a fast elevator. I went to bed in those conditions and during the night, the chain in the anchor chain locker, just forward of our berthing space, changed positions. It hit the bulkhead a good blow and, not realizing it was the chain moving around, my magnifying mid-west mind projected that we were running through an ice field. I was tempted to get dressed and go up to my gun tub refuge, but after noting that the "old salts' in the space were undisturbed, I decided to not be disturbed either.

Next morning we moored to a pier in Seward, Alaska and stayed there most of the day while stores were off-loaded. We were allowed to get off the ship, but could not leave the pier, so I was on the pier watching the operation. I remember overhearing a conversation between two ladies who were happy because they would soon be able to buy bananas. That took me back to the war years when rationing and shortages kept lots of things on the "unavailable" list, but I was surprised that in 1953 people were still experiencing shortages, especially on something as common as bananas.

We left Seward in the afternoon, steamed through the night, and next morning moored in Kodiak. It was 24 December, and I recall that daylight did not arrive until almost 1000. At about 1430 it was getting dark again. I loved the place!

I spent Christmas in the Naval Station Receiving Barracks and the following day I reported to Fleet Weather Central, Kodiak. It was there I received the first and most severe blow of my short naval career. I was told that, of the six of us, four of us would be transferred to Adak for duty. The only two who would remain were the married men. I was not married, and I was not a happy sailor. I requested and was granted an audience with the commanding officer, pleaded my case with the soundest of logic, but the man would not be swayed. I had to go to Adak. I have never forgiven the Navy for the unjust way in which they pitted the single guys against the married ones, and I surely never forgave that commanding officer for his stubborn adherence to an unjust policy. My sole satisfaction came from the fact that many years later, he retired as a

commander, and I retired as a captain. And when I was of sufficient rank to be of influence, I definitely made changes to that flawed policy.

So my stay in Kodiak was a short one, and having spent Christmas 1953 there, I soon boarded a Navy transport plane bound for Adak. I always thought it to be kind of neat to have spent Christmas in Kodiak and New Years on Adak.

The Navy transport squadron had a scheduled run to Adak, always arriving on Wednesdays. The Naval Station had a policy wherein one could check in to the station for duty only on Tuesdays. This insured that the receiving barracks always had a full complement of worker ants for the purpose of off-loading ships, painting, scraping paint, and doing general cleaning chores. The man in charge of the receiving barracks was a first class boatswains mate (BM1); he was arguably the most intensely disliked man on the island. The word was that if one did something to tick him off, one didn't get to leave on Tuesday, but stayed on for an extra week! That kind of crap had gone by the board by the time I had 10 years in the Navy, but it certainly was prevalent in the '50s. This BM1 operated his little kingdom with interference from no one, and he never ventured away from his domain other than to go to the mess hall - no movies, no chapel, nothing. Then one night, after I had been there about 10 months or so, the little tin god ventured up to the Enlisted Men's Club for a beer. It seems someone took exception to his presence and really beat the snot out of him, while folks looked on. I thought it was poetic justice myself, and an overdue reward for his past actions.

Eventually, the week passed and I was finally checked into my work station - Aerology Division, with working spaces on the main deck of the hangar. I had learned well in the School house and in very short order I was a contributing member of my watch team, taking and recording weather observations, encoding and decoding weather reports and plotting weather maps. There were three of us on the watch team and we became a close-knit working group when we were working, with not much in common away from the weather office. One played poker during his off-duty time; the other wrote letters, seemingly non-stop, to his girlfriend. As for me, I was under the influence of a chance comment I heard from an administrative sailor boasting of the fact that he would be leaving in a few days and he had managed to go the entire year without ever going outside. The pallor of his chalky white skin supported his assertion and served to convince me that there was a life to live outdoors and I would take that avenue. The barracks, mess hall, chapel, administrative offices, bowling alley, theater, hobby shop, gee dunk and enlisted men's (EM) Club were all connected by tunnels and/or covered passageways, so it was possible to spend ones life under cover. The weather office, fortunately, was housed in a wood framed hangar, built during WWII, and could be reached only by vehicle or a long walk. The Navy ran busses to get us back and forth to work from the barracks. Those rides were an adventure of their own sort, because the roads were primitive and featured many potholes, which the bus drivers made no effort to circumvent. Perhaps they believed that if the bus should fall apart, they would be out of a job and could idle away their days doing nothing.

During my days in the training environment I had learned two skills which I was able to put to practical application while assigned to Naval Station Adak. One was cutting hair and the other was tooling leather. My net pay during that year was $108 per month and I was able to save $100 per month because of the side income from my hair cutting and leather tooling skills.

Sailors could get their hair cut for 25 cents at the Navy barber shop, reached by walking through a weather-proof tunnel from the barracks, but many of them chose to pay me the 25 cents and save the walk. Some even paid 50 cents, because I cut their hair the way they wanted it cut. The leather tooling industry was a money maker because many sailors wanted a hand-tooled leather purse to send to a mother or girlfriend, or a wallet for themselves. Belts were also a popular item. The Navy hobby shop was well stocked with leather and all the essentials and nobody seemed to mind that I was using a government facility to further my own financial interests. I did not keep a log of my profits, but I kept only $8 per month from my salary, yet managed to keep myself well supplied with fishing equipment and shotgun cartridges. I even bought a nice cast-iron 12-inch frying pan which was put to splendid use. I spent some money on stationary because I, too, had a girlfriend back in the United States. In one of the first letters I wrote to her I told her that I believed I was really going to enjoy my tour on Adak because there were so many girls around – one behind every tree. I appended the PS: There are no trees on Adak.
I found that last statement to be false during my first sojourn forth from the barracks when I came upon a small patch of spruce trees, all about three feet high, and none of them large enough to hide a girl. A sign proudly proclaimed that I was entering and leaving the Adak National Forest. The girl to whom I made my smart-aleck comment is now my wife, Barbara.

I turned 20 years of age less than a week after I arrived. In order to buy or consume any alcoholic beverages, one had to be 21. I thought it a bit odd that I was qualified to operate a 40mm anti-aircraft cannon, but not quite old enough to buy a beer. Odd though it may have been, it was fortuitous for me because I never spent a dime at the enlisted men's club. The gee-dunk had zero appeal, because all of the ice cream was made from powdered milk, and it tasted that way. Going to movies was not my thing either, so I devoted a good deal of time to earning a few dollars rather than spending them. Of course when that rare day came along when there was only a gale force wind and not much rain, it was time to go afield after something, that something being whatever was available and in season.

I mentioned the poor quality of the ice cream and that was of major importance to many sailors. There was no fresh milk – never. The milk served in the galley was made fresh daily, from powder. I was weaned at the age of one or two, and have passed on milk ever since, so for me that was a non-issue, but there were grown men who were close to tears over the fact that there was no fresh milk. The eggs were not fresh from the chicken coop, but they at least came out of a shell – most of the time. There were occasions when the egg supply was depleted and powdered eggs were reconstituted and prepared in a scrambled way. I ate some once. There were too many other things on the menu to want to try them a second time. One jocular stew burner hung a sign on the milk urn one morning that read "Fresh Milk." The uninitiated were drawn to the urn, but after drawing a glassful, turned away in scorn, to the loud guffaws of the cook who proclaimed it to be fresh, because he had just made it that morning. Very few people thought it was as funny as did the cook, and some got outright furious about it.

One Saturday morning the Commanding Officer ordered a personnel inspection, to be held in service dress blue uniforms, with peacoats. I recall standing out in a bitingly cold wind, quite a long time after the scheduled 1000 start time, thinking about what jackass would schedule a personnel inspection in this bleak setting, when there was virtually no one around who gave much of a damn what anyone looked like. The commanding officer arrived eventually and drove

around the assembled ranks in his sedan, debarking occasionally for a better, closer look, but it is fair to say he spent precious little time out on the flight line inspecting the troops. It was approaching noon when we were dismissed and everyone boarded busses, headed for the mess hall.

Going through the chow line was something of an adventure all in itself. We used stainless steel trays, you know, the kind with the compartments, and as we went through the chow line the mess cooks plopped on portions of the various items being served that day. Right after one mess cook ladled a potato onto the tray, the next mess cook in line poured a generous portion of gravy over it. Now Navy cooks are really good at what they do and have long since mastered a particular art in the cooking of potatoes. They know how to get them very well done, cooked to perfection, on the outer 1/4 inch of the potato, while leaving the inner portion pretty much in the same state it was when it was dug out of the potato patch.

This particular Saturday, after going through the chow line, I sat down at one of the mess tables, one of those long affairs with a stainless steel top and sailors seated on benches down each side of the table. I always like my potato mashed flat so I can spread the gravy around better prior to eating it, and I attempted to squash it using the flat bottom of my fork. When I mashed down, there was a loud "sprang", and my potato was gone! I looked first to my left, then to my right, and then in front of my tray. My potato was nowhere in sight. Then as my gaze elevated a little, I noted that the man right across the table from me had TWO potatoes. As my gaze lifted a little higher, I also noted that he had a big brown splotch on his white T-shirt, right above his neckerchief. I could see in an instant that he was furious. I also noted that he was the transient barracks Master-at-Arms, and had four red hash marks below his First Class Boatswain's Mate crow. To an AGAN, he might as well have been God! His job had not gained him many friends on the island and he was absolutely sure that someone had hurled that potato at him. He was more than a little peeved, and seemed intent on determining who the guilty culprit might be. I set about eating the other items on my tray, forgot completely about ever wanting a potato, and extricated myself from his presence as rapidly as possible. I never got out of the habit of mashing my potato, and I still do it, but I now exercise more care and cut it into smaller portions with the edge of the fork before trying to mash it.

In an attempt to familiarize myself with Adak's outdoor world, other than the part of it I routinely saw while travelling back and forth from my work space, I decided to take a short hike along the ridge that extended westward from the barracks toward Shagack Bay. I convinced one of the men who had come to Adak with me to walk along for the experience. We each wore the heavy olive drab parkas that were issued to us when we reported for duty, and for me, that proved to be fortuitous. After about a mile, the ridge we were on terminated in an inactive gravel pit and we pondered our next course of action. My course was determined for me, when I stepped over to the edge of the ridge for a better look at the creek that gurgled along in the valley about 500 feet below. In the blink of an eye, my feet shot out from under me and I was on my back, sliding rapidly downhill toward that creek. I was absolutely powerless to do anything other than roll to one side or the other to miss the rocks that projected up through the ice-covered snow. When I finally came to a halt it was because the steep hill flattened out in the valley bottom, before it reached the creek, and I was able to stop without going for a swim. I was quite

shaken by the experience, unlike any I had ever had before, and I recognized that there could be some difficulty in getting back to where I had come from. I knew it would be foolhardy and fruitless to try an ascent of the hill I had just descended in record time, so I followed the creek upstream, eventually reaching a place where the hillside was less steep and there were more rocks projecting up through the snow. I used the rocks for handholds and, still shaken but not beaten, I regained the ridge from which I had so unceremoniously descended. We deemed it wise to return to the barracks, me with a resolve to be really careful when walking on snow-covered terrain.

There was a station regulation that required every military man who became a citizen of Adak to survive a night on the tundra, without shelter, just to prove he could do it. The term used for this training was "Arctic Survival." Not many months subsequent to ones arrival on Adak he was assigned to an Arctic Survival group which was made up of perhaps 25 others. Participants were issued a sleeping bag, olive drab, filled with a combination of down and feathers. We were also provided a C-Ration pack to be used for our supper. I think the "C" stood for "Combat", but of that I am not sure. I am sure that they were left-overs from World War Two and not especially palatable. A packet of chocolate stated that the contents should be crumbled and mixed in hot water. I was unable to break the bar of chocolate in two and no one was going to crumble it, so I put it in a small tin of boiling water. It got a little slick on the outside, but it never did dissolve into something that could be ingested. I dumped the packet of powdered potatoes into the same boiling water and it soon became suitable for plastering cracks in cement walls. The Lucky Strike cigarette pack was green, a color, I am told, that went out of vogue before the war ended. I do not really recall what it was in that packet that I did manage to eat, but I do recall going to bed hungry, so it was not much. Following the example of an older man in my division, Forest, who eventually became quite a good friend and outdoor companion, I devoted a lot of time to pulling and piling dry grass on which to lay my sleeping bag. In spite of the hollow feeling in my stomach, I slept well and when we sprang to life next morning, our required Arctic Survival training was over. Forest and I repeated the event on several occasions during the remaining months, but never again depended on C-Rations for a food supply. Right up until the day I left many months later, I never failed to chuckle when the local radio station announced that "Arctic Survival for this weekend has been cancelled because of inclement weather." No, they were not joking.

There was one storm of epic proportions that I remember particularly well. It struck in early March, but the exact day escapes me. Tropical storms are called hurricanes or typhoons, depending upon in which ocean they are found and the storms that beset the Aleutian Archipelago are called Williwaws. Unlike the tropical cyclones, they are not named. The one of March, 1954 was a first class Williwaw. The Aerology instrument inventory included a 32-cup Selsyn Ring that could accurately measure winds up to 120 Knots. It not only gave an indication on a dial, but printed out a graph as well. The needle on the graph swung over to 120 and stayed there for well over a minute. Interested folks later asked what wind readings were registered by the 3-cup anemometer. The rotating cups were carried away early in the storm and the dial read "zero" the rest of the time. Many people believed for a time that the old WWII hangar was going to blow over, and in fact, a large body of sailors was called out to lend a hand in shoring up the hangar doors. I was off duty at the time, in the concrete barracks, whose walls shook and

shuddered with every strong gust. No vehicular travel was permitted because nothing but a Sherman tank could have moved safely about. Those on duty stayed on duty, and those in the barracks remained there. Amazingly, even though our barracks wing was on the windward side of the complex, no windows were blown out. Because we were on the second deck, I suppose the shakes and shudders were amplified more than those felt on the ground floor. There had been a radio tower mounted on a hill top 400 feet above the runway height. At night, when clouds came in low, the lights on the radio tower were used to estimate the cloud height, with the uppermost light at 700 feet above the runway. With the top light reflecting off the base of the clouds, the ceiling was reported as 700 feet for several hours. Then one observer, failing to detect any lights, lowered his ceiling estimate to 400 feet. With the dawn, it was found that the cloud height had not changed much, but the radio tower had blown over, causing the reference lights to disappear. After twelve hours or so, the worst of it was over and life on Adak gradually went back to normal. There were some pretty good storms after that one, but never one that pegged the Selsyn read-out at 120 Knots. If your thinking is limited to miles per hour, think around 140 and you will be about right. To really appreciate the ferocity of a storm of this type one must envision a typhoon or hurricane with a driving snow instead of rain. There is a difference.

Since my tour of duty started shortly before the New Year, 1954, my initial view of Adak was in the icy grip of winter, with the snow line extending from the top of Mount Moffett, the islands highest peak at 3,924 feet, all the way down to the ocean shore. At or around the time of my Arctic Survival stint, the snow line was receding upward while the days warmed somewhat as they grew longer. I quickly became enthralled by the profusion of wild flower blooms that followed the snow line up the hillsides. It was literally impossible to take a step in the tundra without crushing hundreds of blossoms underfoot. Admittedly, they were tiny little blooms, but their size detracted in no way from their beauty. Only those with ice water coursing through their veins could fail to appreciate the spectacle that unfolded by the hour as the snowline move upward. I am no botanist and had no name for any of them. One self-styled expert proclaimed that one of especially remarkable beauty was an Arctic Orchid. He may have been right. I was content to admire what I found and at that juncture in my life felt no need to put a name to any of them. I will always carry the fond memory of the flowers following the snowline up the hillsides, even without names for any of them.

When the precipitation form made the transition from frozen to liquid i.e., from snow to rain, the weather office personnel were assigned another seemingly meaningless task. That was to collect the rainfall each day in an oversize bucket and pour it into one-gallon cans, labeled with the day, month and year. The cans were stacked in the office of our division officer. Each time I asked why we were collecting all this water, the division officer responded with some trite phrase which essentially told me I did not need to know why, all I had to do was collect the water. That proved to be a wrong approach on his part. Adak is only a few hundred miles downwind from Russia, there was a cold war in progress, and the Soviet Union was believed to be developing an atomic bomb. It did not take a rocket scientist to figure out that the water which we were collecting originated as water vapor somewhere over Siberia and could very easily show signs of radioactivity. We were into the water collection business almost a month and the empty one-gallon cans were dwindling in number. It seemed practical to me to do some consolidating, so

one night during a midnight to 0700 watch I did just that by pouring the contents of a few cans into one can and then re-label the thing so one could tell which dates where included. When I finished we had many more empty cans to work with and I was quite proud of my accomplishment. I wasted no time in telling our division officer as soon as he reported for work that morning. No outdoorsman he, his complexion was not what one would call ruddy, but it became downright pale when I showed him how I had consolidated about 25 days worthy of raindrops into 7 or 8 cans. He would have been better served had he not been so secretive about the project and just let everyone know why it was important to keep each day's collection separate from the others. For me, the incident provided a valuable lesson that served me well the remainder of my Navy career. People (and sailors are people) do better when they know why a thing is important.

Fishing season was open year round and there were Dolly Varden trout in virtually every creek and lake, so it was only natural that a Midwest transplant who had been reared on a river bank would take to catching some. In this endeavor, I was joined by a fellow-worker, Bernie, who hailed from Springfield, Illinois and was a farmhand like me. We got along well and passed many good times together. Our equipment was economical (cheap) and mostly crude, but fish were plentiful and unwise to the ways of sailors, so we were able to catch as many as we wanted. We eventually tired of catching and throwing back and thought it might be nice if we could eat some of these delectable looking creatures. When I chanced upon a rusty shovel along a small stream, its handle long since broken, it came to me that we could use it for a frying pan of sorts. We caught and cleaned a few small trout and kindled up a blaze using such bits of wood and brush that we could assemble, relying heavily on dead, dry grass to get things started. There was no salt, pepper, nor bacon grease, so the fish were simply placed on the old rusty shovel blade and cooked there until they appeared done. Not surprisingly, they did not taste very good at all and I made a mental resolve to visit the Navy Exchange soon to purchase a frying pan. The 12-inch cast iron model stemming from that resolve cooked many trout, salmon, duck breasts and an occasional steak over the ensuing nine months and all of them were much tastier than the trout cooked on a shovel.

Another legendary part of our existence on Adak was the Naval Emergency Ground Defense Force, or NEGDEF. It was comprised of several elements but the only one with which I was intimately familiar were the six wagon-mounted 40mm cannons assigned to the Air Department. Aerology was a division within the Air Department and we had our very own 40mm wagon mounted anti-aircraft cannon. The cannon was served by a crew of six and I was one of those six, with the assignment of "Trainer." I sat on an unheated steel seat on the left side of cannon. The "Pointer" sat opposite me on the right hand unheated steel seat. We had the combined responsibility to crank wheels to bring the gun sight to bear on the intended target and the Pointer had the additional responsibility to depress the foot pedal that fired the weapon. My wheel trained the weapon horizontally and that of the pointer took care of the vertical movement. As much trouble as we had bringing the sight to bear on a stationery target, I had grave doubts that we would ever have been able to track a moving one, least of all, a fast-flying airplane.

Almost every Saturday was devoted to NEGDEF practice for a period of several months extending from early spring into summer. Each Saturday, I checked out a combat four-wheel-

drive vehicle, with a trailer hitch, from the motor pool, and along with the rest of the Air Department cannon owners, we towed our cannon off into the tundra and practiced setting it up. This meant removing the weight from the tires and transferring it to steel outriggers which would not bounce under the recoil of the cannon. We practiced numerous Saturdays, hauling these rigs out across the tundra, setting them up, turning the wheels that aimed the barrel, but had never fired them. One wet and rainy day we were scheduled for live firing practice and we were really excited. Aerology was the first unit to get its cannon ready to fire and a 6-round clip was dropped into the magazine. The gun captain reported to the LCDR in charge of the operation that Aerology was ready and he told us to start firing. I asked the gun captain what we were expected to fire at, and he, in turn, asked LCDR Windell what we should use as a target. He said "Oh Hell, just pick out something and see if you can hit it". There was a Quonset hut, remnant of WWII, sitting across an arm of a lake, perhaps 250 yards distant. I glanced over at the pointer, we nodded at each other, and started turning our wheels. When the aperture sight centered on the Quonset hut, we sang out "Trainer on Target," "Pointer on Target", to which the gun captain responded "Six rounds, automatic fire, Commence Firing!" WOW! You never saw a Quonset hut reduced to rubble that fast in your entire life! LCDR Windell threw his hat on the muddy road (I did mention that it was raining the whole time), said a lot of unprintable words, all of them directed at Aerographer Mates in general and us in particular. He never fully regained his composure that day, which ended with us towing our weapon back into storage, cleaning it up, and securing.

The following Saturday was to be live firing day for members of the gun crews using the M1 .30 caliber carbines, a semi-automatic weapon that accommodates a 15-round clip. LCDR Windell had us all strung out along an unused roadway, prone position. Because I usually shoot left-handed, I took the far right position in the line of shooters. Mr. Windell trooped along behind us and started singing out the necessary preparatory commands: "Ready on the right, Ready on the left". I interrupted him at that point to inquire what we were supposed to shoot at. He started by saying "Oh Hell, I don't care. Shoot at anything". Then he immediately followed that with "No, No, Hell No! Shoot the side of that hill over there!"

I met the guy more formally after his retirement, in 1963, when I was a strapping LTJG and my wife sang in the church choir while his wife played the organ or piano. As we were shaking hands he was heard to mutter "Adak - 1954 - Aerology". I Never did learn if his failure to ascend past LCDR resulted from the demise of the Quonset hut or not.

The approach of the summer solstice lengthened the days to the point where one had to learn to sleep in daylight and created some very early morning fishing trips. This next episode, while it took place on Adak, really had its beginning on Lancaster Brook in Brown County, Wisconsin, about 5 miles west of Green Bay in early spring, 1945. The spring ice break-up had not yet occurred but Lancaster Brook had some stretches of open water which served to attract a youth of 11 years who was walking home from school. I don't recall exactly what I was doing by the water's edge, but I distinctly remember spotting a pair of tiny black dots on the creek bottom, not far from the shore, in about a foot of water. Closer examination disclosed a larger dark spot which, under scrutiny, was determined to be a turtle's nose. The tiny black dots were the nostrils. It took only a little probing and digging in the creek bottom to pry loose one quite large snapping turtle, that was not altogether pleased to have his hibernation abruptly terminated. For me, it was

a prize indeed. Those were the "War Years"; meat was rationed and a large turtle represented several meals of really fine soup. So I carried the turtle home by its tail and brought delight to all the other members of my family.

Now "fast forward" to May, 1954 which found me fishing a fresh-water lake on Adak.

I had worked the evening shift at the weather office, gone to midnight chow, then struck out across the tundra, wearing my hip boots and carrying my fishing rod. It was about 0100 and, as is the norm for mid-May, daylight was coming on fast. By the time I arrived on the lakeshore it had dawned. I stepped into the icy waters in my non-insulated hip boots, waded only a few feet out from shore, until the water was about knee deep, and started fishing. I had been at it just a few minutes when I suddenly felt the lake bottom moving beneath my feet.

There are probably few minds more imaginative than one of a young lad transplanted from the fields of Wisconsin to the tundra of the Aleutians, especially one who has not been to sleep yet, is completely alone in his world, with nary a soul in sight, nor a sound to be heard.

My mind immediately returned to the amphibian that had lain on the bottom of Lancaster Brook some 9 years prior, and I conjured up the notion that I was standing on the back of one very large Arctic Turtle! I had awakened him for sure and I had better soon determine on which end is its head! Then I noticed that the water level on my boots was **below** my knees, and getting lower rapidly! This had to be some Arctic Sea Monster that I had awakened rather than a mere turtle, and it is coming up out of the lake bed! I am not a coward, but I do know when to beat a hasty retreat, and that time had arrived. With no further regard for which end had the head on it, I scrambled up the bank and adjoining hillside without so much as a backward glance, until I was well away from the lake shore. As I turned around to get a look at the "creature", the whole hill started shaking. It was then I realized that I was experiencing an earthquake - quite a strong earthquake and the first of my short life. I started to sit down, but then thought better of it. If the earth should open up, I wanted to retain the option to leap over a crevasse, if necessary. A look at the lake showed that the bottom where I had been standing was now just moist sand and wet rocks. It was then I noticed a lot of splashing going on way over on the far shore, a long quarter-mile away. The splashing subsided and while I was still puzzling over all that was going on, I noted that a substantial wave was coming across the lake toward me.

I scrambled higher up the hill and watched, as the place where I had been standing to fish only a few short moments before, was suddenly engulfed by a huge wave, which then receded, again exposing the lake bottom. Soon there was more splashing on the far shore, and once again, the wave came back. I watched for quite some time as the water made its way first to the far side and then back to my side, while the amplitude of the waves diminished. I was not tempted to return to my fishing. The whole experience was quite unnerving and I felt singularly blessed that I had vacated my fishing site in a timely manner. Had I not done so, I would have been engulfed by the returning water and would probably have perished. I was a good swimmer, but not while wearing a parka and hip boots. So, being a true sailor at heart, I calculated that if I started back for the

barracks now, the chow hall would be open for breakfast by the time I got there, and I headed out across the tundra.

I opted to tell no one about my experience. I considered doing so, but came up short on descriptive terms and decided no one would believe it anyway. It would be 12 more years before I learned that I had been eye-witness to a seiche, a phenomenon that is not common, but common enough to have acquired the name "seiche". It is what happens when the water in the wash basin gets to rocking back and forth, only in my experience, the wash basin was about 50 acres of Adak lake, and the sloshing back and forth was brought on by an earthquake. A seismograph was installed on the island shortly afterward and during my remaining months on Adak it recorded several earthmoving events.

With the arrival of summer there were salmon runs in every stream. I knew next to nothing about salmon back then and I cannot claim to be any sort of an expert on salmon now, but I did know that there were two types that came into the streams reachable by walking from where I lived. The more common was referred to as "humpback" and the kind I never caught were silver salmon. Sockeye salmon spawned in streams on the opposite side of the island but there was no way to get there. That is, until Bernie learned about a place named "Bay of Islands," reachable by a 5 or 6 mile hike over a shallow mountain pass and down into an adjacent watershed. We had an off-duty day and the two of us struck out across the hills, on a trail for a while and then by dead-reckoning through the pass. Soon after reaching the summit we could see the bay and headed for the stream that fed into it. The stream was full of salmon of the variety called sockeye and we caught and released fish for an hour. Where the stream met the ocean, remnants of a former military encampment still stood in the form of Quonset huts and in one of them were the accoutrements required for preparation of a fish dinner, minus flour and breading. We prepared and ate one fish, then went back to fishing to catch one each to haul back to the Aerology office. I will never know why we each kept the largest fish we could collect, but that is what we did, in spite of the fact that we were faced with a 6-mile hike over a mountain pass and through a lot of tundra. We were not far along when the rain started and our parkas grew heavier and heavier with each accumulated water drop. The temperature was in the forties and the rain pelted down relentlessly, yet we slogged on with a fishing rod in one hand and a heavy fish hanging from the other. I had not yet heard the term "hypothermia" so I had no idea that we should be fearful of being brought down by that malady. Instead, we kept going, occasionally shedding a parka to shake off the surplus water, and then putting the water logged thing back on. Our continued marching along in the worst of conditions undoubtedly served to keep our body temperatures up and led to our safe, albeit wet, arrival. A warm cement barracks had quite a good feel to it that day. We often spoke glowingly of the grand time we had over at the Bay of Islands, but we never returned.

Some weeks later Bernie heard (Bernie always seemed to be hearing about something) that we could catch shrimp off the wharf in the harbor. Neither of us, having been reared in America's Heartland, had ever seen a live shrimp, nor had we ever seen one that was not already cooked and served in a Navy mess hall. But we both liked shrimp, and thought it would be fun to catch some for eating. A visit to the right places in the Public Works Department served to provide us

with a large section of ½-inch mess hardware cloth which we formed into a square dip net. I do not recall the source of the line we used, but I know we went to the galley and acquired some boney chicken parts from the stew burner on duty. Before darkness fell on the summer day we were out near the end of the wharf and dropped our baited net into the icy waters of Adak Harbor. We had a 5-gallon bucket which we had brought along to carry home the shrimp. After what seemed an appropriate wait, we hoisted our net and, to our astonishment, it held scores of shrimp! We dumped them on the wharf and lowered our net for another haul. Then we cleaned the shrimp by breaking them in two, put the edible end in the bucket, and pitched the other end into the sea. When we had the first batch cleaned, we hauled up the net, and had as many or more than the first haul. This process continued and the 5-gallon bucket accumulated more and more cleaned shrimp. There was, however, one bug in the bouillabaisse – every once in a while our net came up with a giant sea spider, armed with powerful forceps and supported by eight legs, and it was eating our bait! That was not to be allowed, so we removed and killed the "spiders" and pitched their remains into the same coffin as the shrimp heads. When our bucket was ¾ full of shrimp tails, we decided we had enough and took them up to the galley, where a benevolent Navy cook boiled the whole batch for us. He kept some for his efforts and we ate lots of them, but many remained. We made our way to the housing area and knocked on the door of Forest's house. In spite of the late hour, Forest was delighted to have the shrimp and wanted to know all about the catching. He became particularly attentive when we got to the part about the sea spiders and wanted a detailed description. Not many nights later we were sitting on the same wharf, in the same spot, keeping each and every sea spider and pitching back the shrimp. After all, one can eat only so many shrimp, but Alaska King Crab was a most delectable prize!

Although it was summer, the weather never got really hot. During the twelve months I was there, the warmest temperature that occurred was in August when it topped out at 67 Degrees (F). The reason I remember it so well is because I was out fishing with a fellow sailor who hailed from San Francisco and we haggled over how hot it must be. I do not recall who won the argument, but we couldn't wait to get to the weather office to check the log. We might have arrived sooner than we did, but we decided that since it was so nice and warm, we really ought to go for a swim in the lake we were fishing. The swim was a brief one for both of us. I have no idea what the temperature of the water was, but it definitely was not warm. The other part of that day that became of importance was that the man with me was using artificial flies to catch fish. The number of fish he caught eclipsed mine and I became a dedicated fly fisherman on the spot. The opportunity to pursue my new-found sport was almost a year away, but I knew that I would never be content to use anything but artificial flies on trout, from then on.

Just about the time the allure of fishing was waning, the hunting seasons were opening and there was a good deal of game to be sought. This is by way of introduction to the next significant episode that occurred in my young life.

In early March, a scientist/adventurer named Bob Jones, AKA Sea Otter Jones, arrived on Adak for a brief stay, after spending most of a year on Atka, an island about 50 miles east of Adak, inhabited by a few Aleut people. The purpose of Jones's prolonged visit to Atka was to study

sea otters in a colony that was believed by many to be the last vestige of sea otters on the planet. Jones arrived on Adak aboard the Navy's Fleet Tug Tillamook, accompanied by four sea otter pups which he hoped to raise in captivity. I was one of the many Adak citizens who flocked down to the wharf to view those rare creatures and in some scrapbook somewhere, I still have a black and white photo of the four youngsters. After a few days on Adak, the fleet tug departed for Kodiak, and then on to Seattle. Two of the pups died in Seattle and the remaining two were airlifted to the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. where they lived less than a year. All in all, the story did not end happily and thoughts about keeping sea otters in captivity were abandoned.

The buzz over sea otters gradually subsided, but we had in our weather unit a Navy veteran of WWII, my friend Forest, who had spent a year during the war on the island of Kanaga, an island with a smoking volcano, lying about 35 miles west of Adak. He was the resident expert on the history of sea otters, including their reduction to a remnant population. His blame for their demise focused around the Russians. His year of isolation on Kanaga, living in a formerly Russian trappers' cabin, afforded ample time to study and he delved into sea otter lore as much as he was able. I found him willing to share his knowledge and picked his brain a good deal, learning that sea otter fur is the most valuable of all furs, and its value formed the base price for all other pelts. Its value also resulted in the near extirpation of sea otters. Whether or not Forest ever saw sea otters from Kanaga I do not recall, but I suspect not, because Atka was believed to be their last bastion of existence and Atka is east of Adak while Kanaga is situated to the west.

Forest was an outdoorsman much like me and we fished and hunted as those seasons came along, gradually forming a friendship that endured over the years. His family dwelling was a great repository for the various ptarmigan, ducks and salmon that I acquired and could not cook in the Navy barracks. I learned much, including that the geese we hunted were Blue Empress geese, not found elsewhere in the New World, with an occasional Asian Gray Goose showing up in a flock. Neither species was especially palatable, probably because of their diet. After cooking one of each species, we never shot any more geese. Ptarmigan were, on the other hand, highly prized game birds, as were the many green wing teal. Ptarmigan are in the grouse family but dissimilar to other grouse in two important aspects. First, ptarmigan turn white in winter, like our snowshoe hares and secondly, they have very dark flesh – deep maroon colored – and very tasty. It made for a great day of hunting when the ptarmigan turned white when snow cover was skimpy.

Sea lions, rightly or wrongly, were considered undesirable critters because they ate salmon and other prized menu items, and were regarded as targets of opportunity. We never got near enough to shoot one, but I will relate an experience that started with the sighting of a sea lion – or so I thought.

One day, while descending a steep hillside to the shore of Shagack Bay, I noticed a large head bobbing in the surf near shore – near enough to shoot. I stayed back from the water's edge and made my way along the shore through the tall grass until I believed I was about where the sea lion had been. I quietly exited the tall grass and looked out in the surf, fully expecting to detect that beast. Nothing. I looked up and down the coast and out beyond the surf, and still saw nothing. While I visually searched, and puzzled over the emptiness of the scene before me, a large dark animal reared up from the grass 10 feet from me. Had it not barked, the end may have

been different, but bark it did, and the muzzle of my gun automatically swung and fired. In the instant of firing, my brain told me "That is not a sea lion". Before I had crossed the 10-foot interval separating us, I knew I had killed a sea otter – here on Adak where none are supposed to be! What a gut-wrenching experience that was!

It was a magnificently huge male, weighing about 80 Lbs. I skinned the hapless creature, put the carcass in the cover of some rocks, and secreted the hide where it would be safe from roving foxes. Then I walked three miles to Forest's house and told him my tale of woe. His commiseration was short-lived and we were soon on our way to retrieve that priceless pelt. Forest kept it in his freezer until his transfer back to Continental U.S. and then he tanned it for posterity. I saw him last in 1964 and shortly after that he retired back to Iowa, presumably becoming the only Iowan who owned a sea otter pelt. Now Forest hunts on the other side of the clouds so he is safe from prosecution. I fervently hope the statute of limitations has run its course for me, because I have no desire to be incarcerated.

That fateful day was just the first of many that would follow with my sea otter adventures on Adak. A few days later, on the shore of the same bay, I came upon a sea otter pup lying on its back on the beach – sound asleep. A mature sea otter plied the waters just off shore, paying me no heed. I poked the youngster in the belly with my gun barrel, causing it to open one eye, then the other. Then it closed both eyes again and went back to sleep. I believe that it and its parent were seeing a human for the first time in their lives. I watched the parent, which I took to be the mother, floating on her back, clutching something to her chest. My binocular was a puny 4-power, but the range was short and I could see that the sea otter was using a stone to break open a sea urchin. I think that was my first time to witness use of a tool by an animal.

My fascination with sea otters continues to this day and I have watched with keen interest as they have expanded their range east and south. Sea otters are nowadays common from the Aleutians all the way to California and half way down that coast. Their expansion has not been a smooth one in all cases because they compete with humans for good things to eat from the sea floor, such as Dungeness crabs. They sometimes become entangled in fishermen's nets and they often become a snack for a roving orca, or killer whale. Sharks, too, eat them, but their major predatory enemy remains the orca. People, mostly tourists, line the wharves in San Francisco and Monterey for a glimpse of a sea otter and they remain the delight of humans wherever they are found. And should someone ever ask you what is the big deal about sea otter fur, you might casually mention that a typical mink fur contains up to 500,000 hairs per square inch; a sea otter contains about 1,000,000 hairs per square inch!

Shagack Bay, because of its relatively close proximity to where I lived, about three miles, and the fact that its shores were frequented by waterfowl, became a destination of choice whenever a hunting trip was in order. The trek over the tundra, required to reach the bay, often resulted in the bagging of ptarmigan and once at the bay, there were several miles of shoreline to hunt. During my tenure, the only people I ever saw at Shagack Bay were the ones who accompanied me, so it was a place of great solitude and much allure to this young adventurer. Two streams, separated from each other by a ridge, emptied into the bay and both of them were swell places to catch sizeable dolly varden trout, as well as salmon. The bay itself was fairly round, except where the ridge formed a steep premonitory that ended at the water's edge, forming a small

point. The outer part of the bay was defined by two long spits – a south spit and a north spit. I always intended to visit the south spit, but never managed to do so. The north spit became a destination of choice and I visited that one often, because geese and ducks flew over it and sometimes landed on its inner shore. Both spits were grassless rocky projections from the mainland, varying in length as the tide ebbed and flowed, but both were quite wide at their base ends. The open water gap between the tips of the spits was great at high tide and very narrow at low tide.

One day, unaccompanied, I was hunting ducks, making my way toward the north spit, travelling along what served as a beach – stony sand and gravel, interspersed with rocks. I shot a duck and it landed a few yards off shore, so I threw rocks on the far side of it to wash it shoreward. After several rocks, the duck was further from shore than when it first landed. I concluded that if I wanted that duck, I would have to swim after it. Since it is almost a criminal offense, punishable by life imprisonment, to wantonly waste wild game which one has shot, I stripped down to nothing and swam out after my duck. I do not know what the water temperature of the Bering Sea is, but let me assure you, it is **cold**! The outgoing tide had my duck in its grip and I gained only slowly on my prize. Then I looked down through the crystal clear water and noted that the bottom was a long way down. I glanced back toward the shore and that seemed to be a long way away also. I assimilated the facts, thought about how some people get cramps in cold water and drown, and decided that I would forget the duck. I made for shore as fast as I could dog paddle and, once there, stood on the beach and shivered uncontrollably for about 15 minutes. I still had not learned of hypothermia but I am sure now that I had it and I am equally sure that I was as close to death on that duck retrieval mission as I have ever been in my life. Once I was able to stop shaking, I got dressed and continued on my way to the north spit, vowing that I would never ever swim in cold water again.

Still smarting from the loss of a downed duck, I made an exploratory visit to the spit, rather than more duck shooting. I thought to walk out to the end, just to look at it. When I was out about 300 yards from the base end, maybe one third of the way out to the tip, I chanced upon several things I had never seen before in my life. Giant rib bones, which could only have been from a whale, and numerous smaller items, including vertebrae, were centered in the middle of the spit, far from the water. I believed that I had stumbled onto something of importance but not being an archeologist, did not fully appreciate what it was. I found a rounded out rock, obviously hollowed out by human endeavor – the type of thing one would use to grind something by agitating a rounded stone in the hollowed out rock. I picked it up, thinking to carry it back to the barracks, but then considered its weight and the distance I would have to carry it, and left it where I found it. This was something I would have to share with Forest!

Not many days passed before my return to that site, with Forest, and we probed around for quite some time. Forest identified it as a former Aleut village, or at least a family home site. He explained how the ribs were used as sidewall and roof supports and that by lashing two of them together, an arch was formed. By constructing a series of arches, the structure could then be covered by skins and made into a weatherproof shelter. There were unidentified objects that were part of a human existence but the granite mortar was the only tool we identified. I planned to make a return trip to the site, but I never did. Forest said he would get back again when he did not have a gun to tote, and he would carry home the granite mortar. I never did learn if he went

back for it or not because I left a little over a month later, while he stayed on for another year with his family.

Our day of exploration was not yet over, for we ventured across the base of the spit to the open ocean shore, moving along west and north. We crossed a small point, encountered a lot of rusty barbed wire, concertina wire, left over from World War Two, and then found an army camp, or what was left of it. It had consisted of one large frame building with a faded sign above a broken door that identified the building as a mess hall, several Quonset huts, all in disrepair, and one Quonset hut with a framed entrance that had withstood the ravages of time and weather. That last one was identified as an NCO Club and boasted a stone fireplace, which we promptly put to use with a roaring blaze. Each Quonset, however dilapidated, contained a rusting oil burning heater, which did not intrigue us much since we had no heating oil. The one in the NCO Club looked to be in pretty decent shape and we toyed with the idea of lugging a jeep can of fuel oil out there some day. A stack of 55-gallon drums, piled three high and about 10 drums long was stashed near the ocean, above tide and storm surge. With not much else to do, I thumped on a drum and found it to be quite full of something which ultimately proved to be fuel oil. It was a short leap from that discovery to heat from an oil fired stove, with enough reserve to last most of a century. We cooked an Asian Gray Goose that Forest had shot and quickly decided that we would not be shooting any more of them. It was edible, but not delectable. We stayed over that night and hiked out the next morning, with the avowed intention to return soon. I have never been back, but I believe, with many more months left in his tour, Forest may have re-visited the place. I had several more weeks left on my tour but all of them were in late November and December, not months that provide very many storm-free days. I think of that army encampment once in a while, situated as it was on the northwest corner of Adak, far removed from the main center of activity, and easily conclude that it was not highly sought after as a place of duty. Like the one at Bay of Islands, I believe it was put there as an early warning sight to provide notice to the main base if the Japanese should return, which, of course, they never did.

My time left on Adak was dwindling rapidly and, like every other sailor who was about to leave that barren wind-swept island, I was quite anxious to get back to car horns and neon lights. There was another side to it, however, and that was the things I had not yet done, or had done only once and would like to have done again. (Swimming in the Bering Sea is not included.) I had fished some really nice lakes only once and I had not yet dug razor clams at Clam Lagoon, an aptly named bay with coarse sandy shores. There were unique features that I would leave behind, probably to never encounter again, such as no mosquitoes, no house flies, no sparrows, no starlings, and no feral cats (that last probably because of the stray dog population). I believe it is worth noting that I never made a “count-down” check list, wherein each day is marked with an X, or a notation telling how many days were left on ones tour. I enjoyed what I found and took each day as it came along, never concerning myself with how many remained.

Everyone who left Adak left on an airplane. That is, until 15 December 1954 when about 30 of us who were being transferred back to the continent were ordered to board a ship that was on its way from Yokohama, Japan to Pier 91, Seattle. It seems Adak was right on its return leg. The ironic part was that thunderstorms were non-existent in that part of the world. We weather observers were told that the day we started work there and true to the published word, never logged one thunderstorm. The day we were scheduled to board the ship, however, another great

Williwaw came into the picture, bringing with it some of the finest thunderstorms imaginable. A thunderstorm with rain is one thing, but a thunderstorm with snow balls is something altogether different. What a show that was, and, with the storm force winds, it was sufficiently good as to keep the troop transport from mooring. It stood back out to sea and did not re-enter the harbor until the 16th of December, and got underway again that same afternoon. I did not shed a tear as Adak disappeared in the murky twilight, but I was not leaping for joy either. It had been a valuable part of my education and training and I still value the experiences I had and the things I learned there.