

Three of my Best Experiences While on Active Duty

Submitted by CAPT Ace Trask, USN RET

1. Adak Alaska

In the 70's I was Inspector General (I.G.) for the 13th Naval District located in Seattle, WA. As the I.G. one of my functions was to inspect all naval bases in the northwest region of the United States, including Alaska. Needless to say, I did my Alaska inspections during the summer.

My first visit was a very interesting one, or at least I thought so. I had been in the Arctic in the mid 50's onboard an LST and I found that part of the world to be different. Early on in my visit I went to the northern side of the base, and about five miles out in the rolling hills came across Adak National Forest. Now trees do not naturally grow in the Arctic, but in a small sheltered valley there stood a small grove of trees somebody had planted years before.

Single personnel assigned to Adak had a one year tour. But occasionally, there was a problem as opposites attract and they got married. Problem, where do they live? Well, the base CO solved the problem at no cost to the Navy. One small part of the enlisted quarters was sectioned off and the Seabees took down a wall or two, added a door or two and "**presto**" a small apartment was constructed for the newlyweds to call home. Needless to say, I convinced the Admiral of the 13th Naval District that we should leave that out of my base inspection report.

About 100 to 200 miles west of Adak is a very interesting island I did not get to see but saw quite a few pictures of. I don't even remember the name of the island. But after WWII ended, it was determined the base was no longer required and it was too expensive to dismantle. So they drove trucks onto the runway and broke the keys to the ignition switches and left them there. Additionally, office file cabinets were left along with desk chairs, desk lamps, ash trays, drapes, waste baskets, stale Lucky Strike cigarettes, etc., etc. The base is checked by the navy once or twice a year to make sure nobody is using it.

Back to Adak, late in my I.G. tour McDonalds wanted to put one of their establishments on the new Bangor Naval Submarine base in Bremerton, WA. We thought it would be great but first they would have to put one on Adak. At first they were not too happy, but in time their attitude changed as it became a very nice investment for the corporation.

2. LST Beaching

My first duty in the U.S. Navy was onboard a WWII LST. I was the 1st Lt. and Gunnery Officer. Shortly after reporting onboard for duty the ship was scheduled to participate in an amphibious operation off the southern coast of California. But before the operation was to begin, we were to proceed to a beach landing site to pick up troops and equipment.

Now in the Merchant Marine, one is not encouraged to run their ship aground. Anyways, we got to the embarking area and started to make our approach to the beach. I and the Chief Bos'n were in the forward gun tub right above the bow of the ship. Our job was to tell the bridge when to drop the stern anchor. This anchor would help pull us off the beach, if due to circumstances beyond our control, we did run aground. At 75yds from shoreline was the proper distance to drop anchor. Needless to say, I had never done anything like this before!! And there is no way to precisely know when you are 75yds out.

As we are approaching the beach at approximately 6kts, I said to the Bos'n, "I think we're about 100yds from the beach" to which there was no reply. Now I'm getting a bit nervous and said to the Bos'n, "I think we're about 75yds from the beach." He still didn't say anything. Next, I said "we should let go the stern anchor." Finally, he said "we're about there." Hesitating no more, I called the bridge saying "recommend dropping stern anchor." Thus, the anchor was dropped tethered to 125yds of attached cable. The next few

words I hear over the sound powered phones were “anchor away/25-yard marker away/50-yard marker away/75-yard marker away/100-yard marker away/red cable on deck - clear the fantail, cable away!

Needless to say, the Captain was not pleased. After the beaching we worked our way offshore using the engines, followed by 3 hours of using grappling hooks to retrieve the cable.

3. All Back 1/3



In the mid 50's I was Ops Officer onboard the USS Brattleboro (EPCER-852) and fleeted up to XO. My relief was an ensign going for his doctorate in mathematics who had no at sea experience. The ship conducted night ops in Block Island Sound, south of New London, CT. We would get underway at 1600 and return at 0400. As XO, I did not stand watches. But whenever the new ensign had the watch, I always made sure our senior first-class quartermaster was in the ensign's watch section.

One night, I was in the wardroom and kept feeling the ship's course and speed change. That is not the way these particular evolutions were to be conducted so I went up to the bridge, looked around and went over to look at the navigation chart. The chart had pencil lines going everywhere so I inquired “what the hell is going on here?” They said they were having trouble getting a fix from all the various lights they could see. I said “go to all stop and silence on the bridge.” As things became quiet, I could hear waves breaking dead ahead. I said “go to all back one third.” I don't know how close we were to the beach, but it was way too close! After getting a quick fix I turned operations back to the watch team but remained on the bridge the rest of the night. The problem was the lights they identified were from the wrong lighthouse.

P.S. An “all back full” bell would make the stern dig deeper into the water.