

RECOLLECTIONS OF A LORANIMAL

I was a member of the commissioning crew at Loran Unit 82, Kwadack Island, Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands, on Dec. 13, 1944 and served there until Dec. 30, 1945 when I and the other remaining "plank owner", Walter Steinke of Iowa, flew in a NATS C54 from Kwajalein to Hawaii on the first leg of our way home.

Personnel slated for duty at Units 82, 83, 84 and 85 left San Francisco June 4, 1944 aboard the troop transport YARMOUTH, chartered by the army from the Eastern Steamship Lines. I recall that after we left the pier on the Embarcadero, the vessel circled Alcatraz Island for several hours, supposedly to calibrate the compass. We passed under the Golden Gate Bridge in the late afternoon and subsequently were served a meal which featured greasy pork chops.

From San Francisco, the YARMOUTH proceeded down the coast to Port Hueneme to pick up a contingent of Seabees. We departed on June 6 and, escorted by a Navy patrol craft, proceeded to Pearl Harbor, which we reached at noon on June 12. After taking on fuel, we left Pearl at 1800 and, without escort, soon caught up with a convoy which had left Hawaii earlier in the day.

After crossing the International Date Line, we arrived at Einewetok in the Marshall Islands on June 21 and remained there for three days. The Seabees and some Marines aboard transferred to the Mariana Islands invasion fleet (Einewetok was the staging area.) and on the morning of June 24 the YARMOUTH and a Navy yard oiler were the only ships in the lagoon.

Departing from Einewetok on June 25, we arrived at Kwajalein Island at 1000 on June 27. We in Unit 82 expected to disembark there but instead we remained aboard the YARMOUTH as it proceeded to Majuro, arriving there June 28. The crews of Units 83, 84 and 85 went ashore and then the transport returned to Kwajalein on June 30. We landed on July 1 and for the next month we were the "guests" of Navy Gropac 12 as we waited for construction materials to arrive. These did not show up until August 1.

A group from the construction battalion, Unit 26, went out to Kwadack Island to start preliminary work in late July and we of Unit 82 followed on or about August 6. I remember that on the first night ashore I slept between two wooden packing boxes, with only a tarpaulin overhead. It wasn't too long before pyramid tents were erected but I can't recall that they had plywood floors.

Everybody turned to as construction of the station began and I remember that we started work around sunrise, knocked off during the middle of the day (when it was the hottest) and resumed our labors in the mid or late afternoon, continuing until sunset. I was involved in the erection of the Quonset huts and one of the first to be completed was the mess hall. We were fortunate in having two very good cooks, who could make even C-rations appetizing.

Now, I was rated as a radio technician second class but I also had attended radio operators school at Atlantic City, N.J. from March to September 1943. We had more technicians than actually were needed and were short one radioman so I stood communications watches from the time test runs began on Oct. 7, 1944 until I departed 14 months later. Occasionally, I had to stand watch as both a technician and radioman.

Equipment of Unit 82 included two “C” timers, which were “state of the art” when the station went on the air. Each watch section consisted of two “scopies,” a technician and a radioman and the watch schedule was 1200 to 1600, 1600 to 2000, 2000 to 2400, 2400 to 0400, 0400 to 0800 and 0800 to noon. Radiomen on the 1600-2000 watch regularly copied the news transmitted by a stateside station and I remember that while the Battle of the Bulge was taking place in the Ardennes, I was completely confused by some of the place names. It wasn’t until copies of the Honolulu Advertiser showed up that I learned the correct spelling.

Original equipment of the radio shack consisted of a 125-watt CW transmitter for mode messages, a 5-watt radio telephone for Kwajalein lagoon traffic, and two regular radio receivers. Later, the radiotelephone was replaced by a more powerful set and we could communicate verbally with Unit 85, the monitor and command station, on Enigu Island in Majuro Atoll. (I should have mentioned that Unit 82 was a slave station, Unit 83 at Majuro being a double master.)

I recall the day-to-day life as a Loranimal at Unit 82 as being fairly pleasant, with plenty of beer to drink. The daily ration for quite some time was two bottles of Coca Cola and two cans of beer and many of us saved our beer to consume on our days off so we could get “high” if not completely sloshed. There were some personality conflicts but generally everybody got along well and we were blessed with two superior commanding officers, Ltjg Lamont A. Freeman and Francis X. Closter. The latter was particularly adept at scrounging creature comforts for his men by trading the use of our concrete mixer and bulldozer for boxes of frozen beef and bottles of booze. Navy units on other islands of the atoll frequently had need of such equipment. Less fond are my recollections of Boatswain Jim Santee, who was in charge while Unit 82 was being constructed.

Shortly after the station went into commission, we acquired a bitch, Augie, who had a Doberman body but was the size of a terrier. She quickly became a much loved pet and when the opportunity arose, we arranged to have her bred to a nondescript male mongrel on a Navy sound station on nearly Bascomb Island. She delivered six puppies, no two of whom were identical. We found homes for four of them, retaining two, Bruno and Tippy. The former was a male and one of the stupidest animals I have every known. The latter was absolutely fearless.

I must admit that I have forgotten the names of most of the men with whom I served on Unit 82. Those I do recall are Harry “Tiny” McGowan, Charlie Schoenmehl, Heuer Grandstaff, Fred Scheffe, Bob Rich, Ken Klingerman, Kip Owen, Milton Hershkowitz, Joe Gabay, Paul Mahoney, “Red” Whitcomb and Merton Glutting. Now that I have reached my 83rd milestone, my memory is fading. I have no knowledge of how many of these may still be alive!

I spent New Year’s Eve of 1945 in Honolulu and a couple of days later Walter Steinke and I went out to the Navy’s Aiea barracks to await a boat ride stateside. We finally boarded an escort carrier which headed for San Diego. There were were met by a SPAR, who drove us up to Long Beach in a station wagon. There I was told that I could depart for home immediately on rehabilitation leave – but I had to pay my own way. However, if I was willing to wait until orders to my next station arrived, the Coast Guard would pay my train fare and I could take my leave en route. I opted for the latter and had a very enjoyable week in the LA area until I headed east for Newburyport, Mass.

I was quite certain that my next duty station would be Unit 10 on Nantucket and so it was. A month or so after I reported, I accumulated sufficient discharge points and

was ordered to the separation center at Constitution Wharf, Boston. The place was jammed with Coasties awaiting discharge and I was given the opportunity to “commute” between my home in Newburyport, Mass. and Boston for the two days I’d have to be processed. (The Coast Guard paid my train fare, which was \$3 for the two round trips.)

Osmond R. Cummings,
Formerly USCGR 617-791
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