

## Story # 16 Vol V Another Motor Launch Story

I found early on that being boat engineer beat working in the engine-room. I do not recall being specifically assigned to that duty, but there were times when I could and would volunteer for the job. For a time we were anchored off Houghs Neck, Quincy working as the gate vessel) and our launch was regularly used to take personnel ashore for liberty. We also made a fair number of trips to East Boston where many of our supplies came from. On one of the return trips when only the coxswain and I were manning the boat we had an interesting episode getting aboard the ship. As we approached the ship normally the deck watch would take the bowline when it was thrown to him. Occasionally someone else who was out on the deck would do the honors. On this particular day no one appeared to help us so as we approached slowly the coxswain dropped the tiller, ran

forward, took the bowline in hand and jumped for the ladder. I am not sure what happened. His foot might have slipped or a gust of wind may have come up. I suddenly found myself the only one in the launch without the boat attached to the ship. I kept the throttle pretty well down, stood up at the tiller and found that I could handle the shift lever with my foot. As I circled (probably a larger circle than needed) and approached the ship again I was able to shift the engine into neutral, leave the tiller, head for the bow, grab the bowline and toss it toward the deck. By this time there were many people watching this escapade and many willing hands to secure the line from the launch. One of the reasons that we may have had the problem was that we were anchored both fore and aft. If riding on only one anchor, we would have been more or less weather-vaned and it would have been easier to make an approach. Although winds, tides and currents did not always cooperate. Another episode involving the launch also took place while we were still moored off Houghs Neck. Some of our crew decided that they wanted to go on liberty somewhat after our evening meal and that rather than being left on the pier at the Neck, they wanted to go into East Boston. None of the off-duty deck crew would agree to go, so I obtained permission to be acting coxswain and one of the firemen volunteered to go along as boat engineer. Our trip into the harbor was uneventful and we turned to head back to the ship after discharging the liberty bound sailors. I had a fair idea of the configuration of the harbor, but what I had not planned on was getting caught out there after dark. At that time the whole seacoast was blacked out and the ships not under way were not putting out much light. Please believe me, I was very much relieved when the old USS Mahogany loomed ahead. One of the vulnerable areas in the launch was the sea-cock, an opening in the bottom with proper fittings including a valve. A rubber line was there to connect the sea-cock to the cooling system in our Buda diesel engine. Very quickly most of us in the engine room force got to know that engine much more intimately than we had figured on. It was the habit for the boat engineer to close the sea-cock and remove the connecting tube and leave it in the bottom of the boat. It would not be good to leave the sea-cock open and I suppose by taking the line off proof positive that the valve was closed. I also have a very vague memory it might have been a habit that was started during the cold winters at Argentinia Newfoundland where the water in the hose could freeze when the boat was left in the water. However, things do go wrong. The launch was left in the water after one of its trips (one of the last ones for quite a while), one can only guess what happened. Probably the boat engineer pulled off the connecting line and jumped out of the boat without turning off the sea-cock. No doubt it was close to dark and after securing the bow and aft lines no one noticed that anything was amiss. At some time the deck watch noticed that the stern line had parted and the poor launch was hanging vertically by its bowline. Our deck crew managed to get additional lines on it and with our rear boom were able to get the launch up on the boat deck. Our Chief said to turn the engine over and to our surprise it started. However it was a sad sight. The combination of lubricating oil being churned up with salt water made rather a bilious ooze coming from some parts of the engine. I do not recall if there was anything done about leaving the boat that way, but for all practical purposes the whole black gang spent a lot of time up on the boat deck rebuilding the engine. The engine was removed from the boat and we stripped it of every part that could be removed. We had a good supply of replacement parts and we certainly used a large number of them. The last thing about motor launches that I recall, is the part they played while we were at Okinawa. While we were on the China side the navy did use smoke to cover us up from the kamikazes, but it was not till we moved over to Buckner Bay that our launch had a smoke generator installed on her stern and assisted others in pouring out smoke to screen the ships in the Bay.

Doc Berg