
STORY # 45....Net Tenders had duty in icy North Atlantic harbors like Argentina, Newfoundland where the ice chunks floated about as they worked; duty in the wind blown Aleutian chain of Alaska where storms would sweep the nets out to sea for the Net Tenders to retrieve; duty in the Pacific where it was so hot that the steel decks would have to be hosed down so they could work.

At various times 7 different Net Tenders had assignments in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska; 4 for lengthy periods and 3 for shorter periods. The terrain was bare and the weather was mostly foggy. When the warm Japanese currents met with the frigid waters of the Bearing sea it produced vicious storms called Williwa's.

Boxwood AN-8, Buckeye AN-13, Buckthorn AN-14 and Mulberry AN-27 had lengthy duty there. Ailanthus AN-38, Anaqua AN-40 and Eucalyptus AN-16 where there for 6 months or less.

The following information is about Mulberry AN-27. She spent 3 years in the Aleutians. Information is taken from remarks made by Lt Homer Winter, Engineering Officer, in a letter written to Bob Cooper ex crewman on Mulberry, after WWII.

-----Out of midshipman school, I was transferred to Tiburon, California to Net Tending School. Upon completion of school, I caught a transport ship, USS Henry S. Failing, at Seattle heading for the Aleutians. Went onboard the USS Mulberry in December 1944. Transferred off in February 1946.

Most of our duties were tending anti-torpedo and anti-submarine nets. Most of our travels were west of Adak, between Adak and Attu. Just east of Adak there was an island by the name of Great Sitcan, where the Navy had their Net Depot.

The weather was terrible. We were lucky to see the sun 5 days a month. From October through April, we did well to get out to work one day in three because of the bad weather. Storms would come in and sweep the nets out to sea. The first thing we would do after a storm, would be to go out looking for the nets. When we would find them we let the men on the 20MM guns have some gunnery practice sinking the buoys. Many times standing deck officer watch on the bridge (which was about 20 ft above the water line), looking up at a 30 to 45 degree angle we could see the top of the swells.

We spent quite a bit of time at Attu. We had sizeable nets there. There was a place called "Massacre Bay"...very protected from the weather. However we still couldn't get away from the bad weather.

Once we broke down at Attu. We were tied up at the dock at the time when one of the electricians goofed off and there was a leak in the engine room and the water got into the main generator. The ship was patched up temporarily, but we were still out of commission. The Navy sent a fleet tug to tow us back to Adak, a distance of about 400 miles. They towed us faster than the ship usually traveled. The captain of the tug sent us a message which read something like "You guys should be getting submarine duty pay, you're under water most of the time!" We were in dry dock at Adak for several weeks. Adak was the main naval base in the Aleutians. It is located about one half way from east to west.

All through the Aleutians there were underwater volcanic penicals. If you were to watch a fathometer, it would show you to be running 100 fathoms or more one moment, then only 6 fathoms the next minute. Somewhere in the area of "Little Tanaga", there was one of those penicals that had been causing some problems with other ships.(Note it is at Tanaga where Ailanthus AN-38 sank due to a underwater protrusion. See story #4) We were dispatched to go find it and put a buoy down to mark it. We were looking for it and all of a sudden a large swell came along and the penical found us. It put a small hole in the forward hold area, just several inches long and about ½ inch wide. It didn't pose a danger to the ship. We patched it up and then dropped the buoy and returned to our regular net tending. The Mulberry was still there when I was reassigned back to the states. I caught an old tanker back.

Lt. Homer Winter, Engineering Officer.