

## Allen Miles and USS AILANTHUS AN-40 38

After shakedown training in Puget Sound in May 1944 my ship, USS Anaqua AN-40, was assigned to the Aleutian area. We were to replace our sister ship USS Ailanthus AN-38. She had ran aground up there in a violent storm and was declared a total loss.

Until recently I had never heard the details of this disaster. Following is the story as related to me by Allen Miles a former crewman of the Ailanthus

Like most of us Allen grew up during the depression years, when it was a difficult time for our parents. He dropped out of high school to support himself, working in a drive in cafe.

At age 17 he <sup>joined</sup> ~~joined~~ the navy. The navy told him that because of his civilian experience they wanted him to be a cook. Allen didn't want to be a cook, but they sent him to Sand Point Naval Air Station in Seattle where he earned a 3rd class petty officer rating as a cook.

He was assigned shore duty at the Bremerton Navy Hospital where he worked with civilians and was surrounded by good looking nurses. In his own words he said it was a gravy train and he had a ball there. He was also advanced to 2nd class cook while there. Who would want to leave a duty station like this???

Allen would...He didn't want to stay in Bremerton for the rest of the war. He wanted to go to sea and told his captain so. He got his wish. He was assigned to a new wooden Net Tender USS Ailanthus AN-38 in November 1943. The ship was assigned to Alaskan waters and arrived in the bare and foggy Aleutians 4 Feb. 1944. Her career however would be very brief.

Later in the month they picked up a load of steel mats at Adak. They were to be used to make a landing strip on Tanaga Island. When they arrived there they had to anchor off the island because of the rough sea. After about a week of pitching and rolling 35 to 45 degrees, the seas calmed down somewhat. The Captain decided to go in and make preparations for unloading their cargo. That night the winds intensified up to 135 mph. The anchor was dragging and they ended up on a reef. Apparently the ship was sitting on the reef amidship because all the areas below the deck flooded very quickly.. They were stranded aboard the ship, which was resting at a 30 degree angle. Everyone had to crowd into the mess area., officers quarters, bridge or radio shack. It would be 3 days before everyone got off the ship.

When the storm let up some they floated a 5 inch line to the Seabees on shore, a distance of 400 to 500 yards. They rigged it to the boom on a large crane, so they could have a make-shift trolley. One man was put in a cargo net and was pulled to safety along the line. They evidently wanted to speed up the process so they made a box to carry 3 men on the trolley. Allen was one of them.

As they were crammed into the box they were probably looking at the shore, longing to be on level ground. This was not about to happen. A life threatening situation was about to happen. After they had traveled about 200 feet the line gave way and they were dumped about 35 feet down into the cold treacherous waters of the Bearing Sea. In these waters ~~hypothermia~~ could quickly take over. hyperthermia

Immediately the men on shore began to pull themselves along the downed lines to help Allen and his 2 shipmates to shore. It took about 15 minutes to rescue the men and get them to dry ground. The men were given whiskey, coffee and a warm bed. Allen had pulled his arms out of place trying to hold on to the line. He was in sick bay for 3 days. The rest of the crew were picked up the next day in Higgins boats

We did not ask Allen what his reactions were after this terrible ordeal. He may have said: "Boy, I'm glad to be alive so I can go back to sea."  
or "What the h - - - am I doing in this god forsaken place. I could still have had shore duty at the Bremerton Hospital surrounded by good looking nurses."

The crew lived in Seabee tents for about 3 months. Everything salvageable was taken off the ship. Allen was assigned to the Net Tender Buckeye AN-13, which was at Attu. In June 1944 Buckeye returned to Seattle for repairs. Later Tom Fike took over as her skipper. Tom and his wife Evelyn will be hosting the 2003 All Net Tenders Reunion.