

NORTH TO ALASKA

... LorSta Sitkinak Island, Alaska Jan 1972 – 73 ...

In early Sept. 1971, while serving my second tour at LorSta Jupiter (FL), the ET detailer in Washington called me to tell me I was going to Lorsta Cape Atholl, Greenland and must be enroute (via Governor's Island) within 10 days. We were living in government quarters, so that in a ten day I had to find, purchase and close on a house for my family, pack up our possessions, vacate the government quarters, move to the new house, get them settled in and say "See'ya in a year or so!"

I told the detailer that he could not issue restricted orders with so little lead time. I don't know if I had a legal leg to stand on, but evidently I did or else he thought I did. At any rate, these orders were cancelled. Then, in mid-September, he called back with the news that I was going to Sitkinak Island, Alaska (restricted duty) with a reporting date in Jan. '72. I said that I had no problem in accepting the orders, but I was officially requesting that I be given consecutive orders to LorSta Estartit, Spain, when I completed my assignment in Alaska. The detailer said that he was not familiar with this idea. (I can understand his confusion; I had just made this up on the spot. I was hoping that he would not ask me for a reference to the Regs.) However, he accepted the premise that such a thing existed and said that he would comply with my request. I would be going to Spain when I was reassigned from Alaska.

Beyond any doubt, I was now going to Alaska. I had very mixed emotions. I most definitely DID NOT want to be away from my family for a year. However, I had never been in Alaska either. If I had to be away from my family, Alaska was preferable to some of the other places I could have been sent.

Prior to reporting to Base Seattle for transportation, I had to go back to Governor's Island for overseas processing and for a refresher course on the Loran timers & transmitters. This meant that I would miss **TWO** consecutive Christmas' with my family. Plus 1972 was a leap year, so I would have an addition day away from home!! (Strange coincidence...last restricted tour was also over a leap year!!)

Part of this medical processing included a thorough dental exam. I recognized the PHS dentist at Governors Island as being the former 7th District dentist who traveled from station to station with his Trailable (Mobile) dental office. He was the only dentist who had done any work on me for the past four years, so I was very amused to hear him discussing my teeth with his technician...something to the effect of:

"What butcher did this work?"..... "I have never seen such amateurish work."..... "Some incompetent dentist needs to have his license revoked!"

I finally had an opportunity to speak and told him he should look at my records to see who the clown was that did all that lousy work. He did so, and there was a dead silence for the rest of the session!

After the completion of all my processing, I was given a plane ticket and sent on my way to Base Seattle, where I would await further transportation To Alaska. After sitting in the transit quarters for four days I was finally on my way to AirSta. Kodiak via Anchorage on the 14th of Jan. On the Anchorage flight with me was ETC R.D. Harper, HM1 D.L. Kavlik, and CS1 M.N. Ortega. We were all enroute to Sitkinak. We flew on Alaskan Airways to Anchorage, where we were to change and fly on to Kodiak on Wein Airways.

When we went to the Wein waiting area, we could see our aircraft sitting on the tarmac. We waited, and waited, and waited for the boarding to start. We could see what was most likely the pilot having a heated discussion with some fellow in a suit. I decided to stroll out and see what kind of schedule delay we had and invited my three traveling crewmates to join me. When we got close

enough to hear the words I was chilled to hear the "suit" say something to the effect. "You are late already. Load your passengers and get this plane to Kodiak, They will fix it there!"...

The pilot replied that he is "...not taking off until **IT IS FIXED!** If management thinks otherwise, the union is going to hear about it!".....

When I heard this, I looked at Chief Harper, he looked back at me, and we both said....."No way are we getting on that airplane!" Dave Kavlik and "Cookie" Ortega agreed with us.

About that time, a CG C-130 landed and taxied up. The crew wanted a coffee break. I saw the magic words "Kodiak" on the tail and walked over to the crew chief, inquiring if they were headed home to Kodiak. He said they were, so I asked if there was room for four passengers with luggage. It was agreeable with the pilot, so we loaded our stuff aboard and settled in for the flight. As we taxied off, we could see the Wein employees still arguing.

We sat in the transit quarters at AirSta Kodiak for another four days, waiting for the scheduled "log" flight out to Sitkinak. This wasn't too bad as my good friend from Jupiter, Dave and his wife Julie invited me to stay with them in his quarters. The only problem with sitting at Kodiak awaiting transportation was that our tour "clock" did not start counting down until we actually reported in to Sitkinak.

Sitkinak Island is actually three uninhabited islands (except for the Coast Guard Loran Station crew). Collectively, they are called the Trinity Islands and are off the western end of Kodiak Island, separated by a seven mile channel. The three islands are Tugidak, Sitkinak, and East Sitkinak. Sitkinak and East Sitkinak were leased by a cattle company in the "Lower 48".

There were no trees on any of the islands, merely low scrub brush. In the center of the island there was a mountain that was called Sitkinak Dome. On top of the Dome was an abandoned Air Force Radar Station.

By a strange coincidence, I had actually had orders to be assigned to this station in 1959, while I was still in The Air Force. These orders were cancelled when the Air Force decided to stop the construction of this station and abandon it as their strategic requirements changed. Instead, I was sent to a radar station in Spain. Now, 13 years later. I was on Sitkinak and in another year would be on my way to Spain again!!!

The Loran station consisted of three buildings. One building housed the CO & XO quarters/CPO quarters/crew's barracks, the messdeck/galley and the admin spaces. The second was the "Signal/Power" building. This housed the radio/comms center, the Loran timer room, ET workshop and tech storage spaces in one end. Towards the center were the engineering spaces with their office spaces, general supply and storage spaces. The end opposite the ET spaces contained the generator compartment, the garages, and the DC shop. The third building was the Transmitter building and its transmitting tower.) I believe we had a 650 ft tower, but I am not certain after this long period of time. The station was built close to a paved runway. Evidently, this runway had been built for the AF facility.

As a lark, we had dragged an old gutted hulk that was all that remained of what had been airport crash/foam fire tender and placed it along side the runway. As it had no wheels or tires, we cut out some plywood circles in the appropriate diameter and painted them black. Once, when an Air Force C-130 paid us a visit the pilot told us, after he made a successful landing, that he was a bit nervous when he made his approach, but if the CG pilots could land on a regular basis, he could also. The deal setter was when he saw that a crash truck standing by. When he got a close up look at our fire truck he actually, blanched and shuddered. Mayhaps Zoomies don't understand Coastie humor!!

From the station there was a graveled road that went past the ranch area and onto the beach. At the ranch complex there was a barn, a few corrals and a large rambling ranch house. We sort of used this area as an escape from the dullness of station life. There was a large freshwater creek that ran past the ranch house area. The road crossed it over a pair of large culverts. Just beyond the ranch house area was a beach. This was on the side of the island that faced Kodiak. This beach was gravel covered, and much of the gravel was low-grade gemstones, primarily garnets. We had a rock polisher that ran 24/7. Everyone took home small bags of the polished gemstones as gifts and souvenirs.

The Loran station itself was only about seven foot above sea level, so the danger of a tsunami was very real. In the event of a tsunami we were to get a FLASH message from the District Office, so we could evacuate to higher ground and await rescue. There was a small concrete warehouse stocked with emergency items halfway up the side of Sitkinak Dome, well above the potential flood line of a tidal wave. This emergency supply stock was to insure our survival after the station was washed out to sea and we were stranded.

However, someone had built this place of refuge at the base of the dam the AF had built to form the reservoir for the radar station. Sitkinak is in the earthquake zone, so I personally thought that building a refuge point under a dam that may collapse in an earthquake was rather stupid.

We did get one FLASH tsunami warning that we could expect a 30 foot surge. We didn't bother to evacuate as the tidal wave was scheduled to have hit us ten days before we received the message! So much for our adequate early warning!

One evening I was lying in my rack reading when there was one tremendous jolt. My first thought was that some stupid so and so has just run into the barracks with a 6X6 2 1/2 ton truck. My next thought was....."There aren't any six-bys on this island!!" It was an earthquake, my first one. It was a very minor tremor, but to this southern boy it was plenty big enough. For the next six days at almost the same exact time we had an aftershock, each one much weaker than the previous one.

The weather on Sitkinak was best described as miserable. It wasn't all that terribly cold, just wet, windy, and extremely chilly. We would go for days and days with heavy fog. In fact, the CO (LTJG Lynch instituted the policy of declaring Holiday Routine when the sun was actually shining. We would go for days on end with the wind blowing at 75-80 knots. In Florida this would have been a hurricane and it would have lasted for a day only at the most. We actually had to rig ropes between the buildings as safety and guide lines so personnel could travel from the barracks building to the Signal/Power building without being blown into the lagoon or actually being lost in the whiteout. Whenever we left the immediate station proper on "liberty" or whatever, we had to check in and out with the OOD and carry with us an emergency kit with rations, a space blanket/sleeping bag, fire starter, etc. We also frequently carried one of the "walkie-talkie radios. The highest temperature I saw was on July 5th. It was 67 degrees, the station record!

To the southwest of the station was a large fresh water lake. This was the source of our drinking water. It was so pure that we simply pumped it directly to the station.

This lake was the place where newly promoted personnel were thrown in by the crew to "wet down" their new chevrons. In those days the Guard had two promotion cycles for E4 – E6. This was the July and the December Promotion List. (The Chiefs promotion list was published only in December). In July the lake water was cold.....about 40 degrees. In December, we had to break the ice to carry out the tradition. While people wanted to be promoted, most hoped to make it on the July List and definitely not in December. When the December List was published and we did have several names on it, I was called into the CO's office for a briefing by the Skipper. As the leading

petty officer on station, I was sort of the Master of Ceremonies. The CO stated that he did NOT want anyone thrown into the lake, however, we could make the initiates think that they going to be thrown in. This worked fine until one brand new 2nd class MK broke away from his handlers and stated that no one was going to throw him in the lake....he would jump in first!! **AND HE DID.**

I had a heck of a time trying to convince the Mr. Dickmann that we did NOT throw him in. The CO found it difficult to believe that someone would voluntarily jump in that freezing water!!! (Chiefs did not participate in the festivities, they merely observed and suggested.)

When "Doc" Kavlik, "Cookie" Ortega, and I arrived we found that we were $\frac{3}{4}$ of the 1st class petty officers. The only inhabitant of the 1st class quarters was EM1 Darrell South. These quarters were in the end compartment of the barracks. We each had a private "room". The partitions were made up with our tall wooden wardrobe/closets and dressers placed so as to make up a wall between the two spaces on one side of the "hall". The other two inhabitants had a similar set up on their side of the center "hallway". The hallway partition was formed by our large wooden bookshelf while the door was a shower rod with a heavy curtain hanging down. At least we had a semblance of privacy. As we were the end compartment, we did not have the hallway traffic the lower grades endured. To be truthful, I don't really know what the lower grades had for their quarters. I believe the non-rated men slept 8 to a compartment that was slightly larger than ours. They had the standard double-deck rack setup. The junior petty officers probably had a similar arrangement as the 1st class did, but probably not as "spacious"!!

My window looked out (and upwards) towards the runway, but when I arrived, there was a big snow bank that sort of filled the space between the building roof and the runway. I opened my window and dug out the packed snow to create a cubed space that was the same size as my opened window. This became my refrigerator in which I stored my soft drinks and snack tidbits. The barracks were heated by electrical space heaters; but in our compartment (and many others), they were inoperative. However, the buildings were well insulated and we were sheltered from the wind by being on a slope below the runway; and the buildup of snow banks around the exterior meant that even without heat the interior temperature in the barracks was around 70 degrees. (Of course, one did not tarry in the showers or heads!!)

The chief petty officers shared a wing that had four private bedrooms, a communal head and a sitting room/lounge area with a refrigerator and hotplate. As there were only three CPOs, they used the fourth room as a huge walk in closet & storage area.

The CO and XO had a separate wing with their quarters. Each had a bedroom with a private head and a study/sitting room. They had a communal lounge and small galley/ dining area. This wing also contained the station administration area, the CO's office, and the station administration office where Doc Kavlik functioned as yeoman and oversaw the work of his assistant, the storekeeper. The dispensary and small sickbay was also located here.

The station had several canine mascots (all male), Cue Ball, Blue, and Bopper. I really do not remember much about them except that they learned at an early age to NOT enter the messdeck and the CPO quarters. Down at the ranch there were a few feral cats that had been imported to keep the barn and ranch house rodent free. The only wildlife on the island (other than birds) were lemmings. The cats survived on these animals. The cat's only predators were the bald eagles, so they never left the buildings in day light. One mother cat had two litters at the same time, one litter in the house and the other in the barn. She had to zip and scoot between the buildings to keep her kittens fed.

Soon after my arrival, I was given an international airport directory update form to fill out. (For some inexplicable reason Sitkinak Island's runway had become designated by some bureaucratic genius as an international airport. I had fun filling out the replies to the questionnaire:

How far is it from the terminal to downtown Sitkinak? **400 yards**
 What restaurants are available to the travelers? **Cogard Sta Sitkinak Mess Deck**
 What are the ratings of the hotels? **Negative 3 Stars.**
 What public transportation from the terminal to the downtown area is available? **Two feet and a pair of legs**

Most of the rest of the questions had to do with airport facilities, which I did try to answer seriously. The forms were sent off and I never had any repercussions, but I also never knew if Sitkinak retained its status as an international airport. I also wondered how it got on this list in the first place!!

When we "Four Musketeers" arrived on Sitkinak in Jan. 1972, the crew consisted of the following people. These are the people I saw rotate back to the States. One of the seamen kept insisting that Sitkinak was the real world...when people left, they died! His evidence to prove this theory was: "Have you ever seen anyone come back after they have left here?".....

Personnel are listed in order of rotation (with exception of CO & XO)

| | | Tour Dates | | | Tour Dates |
|------|------------------|-------------------|------|---------------|-------------------|
| LTJG | T.R. Lynch | Apr 71-72 | | | |
| CWO2 | E.A. Mellot | Jul 71-72 | | | |
| ET2 | D.A. Morrison | Feb 71-72 | SN | B.S. Benson | Aug 71-72 |
| EN3 | M.M. Clark | Mar 71-72 | ET2 | E.H. Houde | Sep 71-72 |
| ET2 | M.A. Bourland | Mar 71-72 | ET2 | S.E. Alfield | Sep 71-72 |
| SK3 | J.A. Beardsworth | Apr 71-72 | FN | J. A. Dick | Sep 71-72 |
| EN3 | C.H. Hall | Apr 71-72 | SN | G.D. Carlson | Sep 71-72 |
| EN2 | P. Piraino | May 71-72 | FN | D.W. Bryant | Sep 71-72 |
| SNEW | C. D. Stump | May 71-72 | SN | R.J. Hodge | Oct 71-72 |
| BMC | D.L. Ferrell | May 71-72 | SNEW | B.R. Marshall | Oct 71-72 |
| ET2 | A.C. Foster | Jun 71-72 | SN | D.A. Nelson | Oct 71-72 |
| SN | J.M. Sheppard | Jun 71-72 | ET3 | J.G. SPENCE | Jan 72-73 |
| RM3 | M.A. Wood | Jun 71-72 | ET1 | R.L. Nahikian | Jan 72-73 |
| EM1 | D.L. South | Aug 71-72 | CSI | M.N. Ortega | Jan 72-73 |
| DC2 | L.W. Jones | Jul 71-72 | HM1 | D.L. Kavlic | Jan 72-73 |
| SN | T.L. Edgerson | Aug 71-72 | ETC | R.D. Harper | Jan 72-73 |
| SN | W.J. Walker | Aug 71-72 | | | |

The Loran station had "air service" from two sources. Kodiak Airways had a contract to bring out our mail and fresh produce and milk several times a week. They also brought in or took out personnel who were reporting in or rotating back to the outside world. This was our commercial connection with Kodiak. However, we found out that the notion of a predicable schedule was non-existent. Weather and fog played a big factor. Another factor was the fact that the air service might be too busy with flights to the many small coastal villages on Kodiak. Aircraft were the only link these villages had with the outside world as there were no roads beyond the immediate vicinity of the city of Kodiak itself.

Kodiak Airways used a variety of aircraft. They were flying a classic 1940's era Grumman Goose amphibian, several twin-engined Cessnas, and several single-engined "stretched" fuselage Cessnas. The land planes used the beaches near the small villages as a runway, while the Goose landed in the bay and taxied up onto the beach.

Almost all aircraft were busy with charter flights during the ptarmigan hunting season. Therefore, they were quick to say that the weather was too bad to come out to Sitkinak.

These were real "bush" pilots, and every time I flew with them was an adventure. I don't recall why, but I had at least two round trip flights to Kodiak and my final one way trip when I went home in Jan. '73. (I do recall now that one trip to Kodiak was to attend a school on Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Warfare survival training.

One of my return flights to Sitkinak was in the Goose. The passenger compartment was so filled with cargo there was no room for the passenger (me). This minor problem was solved by the ground crew bringing out a step ladder so the pilot and I could climb up and drop into the cockpit through the overhead cockpit emergency exit panels. Once we were settled in, the plane waddled down to the lake that was at the end of the runway and off we went. Incidentally, the full name of Kodiak Airways was "KODIAK AIRWAYS AND OUTBOARD MOTORS, INC. The company motto was **A SPLASH OF SPRAY AND WE ARE ON OUR WAY!**

Another outbound flight was in a twin-engined Cessna. Again, the passenger space was filled with cargo, so the usual stepladder and cockpit overhead exit pane passenger-boarding system was used. This seems to be a **Standard Operating Procedure** for KA! This time we were so overloaded the aircraft was sitting on its tail bumper with the nose wheel off the ground. I was curious as to how we were going to be able to take off. Not to worry, out of the hanger two mechanics came trotting, carrying the "boarding" step ladder. They placed it beside the airplane's nose and the heaviest mechanic climbed up and laid down across the nose. The other fellow removed the ladder and stood back. The addition weight was sufficient to bring the nose wheel down so the pilot could taxi. As soon as we were taxing fast enough for the aircraft to remain level the mechanic slid off and we lumbered into the air!!

However, one of my flights to Kodiak will be in my memories for a long time... We were in a single-engine Cessna. Our aircraft didn't have the "oomph" to fly over the peaks so we were flying up the canyons and valleys to use a pass through which we could cross the high interior mountain range of central Kodiak.

The weather was miserable with rain, fog patches, etc. As we were zigzagging up a winding canyon, I could look out and see trees above us and it seems that our wings were almost brushing the rocky walls.

When I looked over at the pilot, he was looking at his watch, and seemed to be counting. Every so often, he would turn the wheel and lightly tickle the rudder pedals. When I asked him if he was doing what I thought he was, he muttered, "Shut up, you'll make me lose count!"

He was actually navigating by memory as to how many seconds on each stretch of the canyon and when to turn to follow the canyon turns as he climbed to reach the altitude of the pass that would lead us into Kodiak (town). I shut up, and griped the seat handles until my fingers were white. I know I left my fingerprints permanently implanted in that stainless steel! Kodiak Airways was definitely not your usual boring airline.

I had developed a rapport with the pilots and could generally get a flight out to the island when no one else could. I knew the pilots could not obtain ptarmigan during hunting season as they were too busy flying charters to have time to hunt themselves. The various hunters among our crew would shoot the birds on our island. I would have "Cookie" quick freeze them. Then I would offer these as a bribe to the ptarmigan-deprived pilots. All they had to do is come out and get them.

We also had monthly logistics flights from Air Station Kodiak. The C-130 would bring out bulky and heavy items, the individual exchange orders, and the commissary canned goods and fresh meat. At times the CG helicopters would also serve to make deliveries. We were allowed a mid-tour leave and for this we depended on a Kodiak Airways flight to get us to Kodiak so we could make commercial flights to the "Lower 48".

When I arrived in January there was a lot of snow on the ground and the fresh water lake had a good, thick ice cover on it. The crew was sledding down the slope from the runway. They sort of disappeared from view and then reappeared zipping across the ice-covered lake. It looked like a heck of a lot of fun. I had grown up in the mountains of western North Carolina; and, even more recently, I had spent three years in Oregon and Washington State. I felt that there was very little I needed to be told about sledding down hills.

However, I was NOT familiar with the local topography. I did not realize the slope that started at the runway did not continue all the way to the lake's edge. It ended a few hundred feet at the brink of a 10 -20 foot cliff! The sledders would sail off this cliff in a "nose-up" attitude. When they hit the ice they did so at a backward-leaning angle. This angle of impact seemed to sling-shot them across the smooth ice surface. My turn came and down I went. When I flew off the cliff, I froze in terror. When I hit I was upright and stiff. I took the entire jolt up my spine. I was in agony and had to be pulled to Doc Kavlik's dispensary lying on my sled. It was well into mid March before the pain finally disappeared.

Previously, I mentioned the cattle ranch that shared the island with us. More accurately, the entire island of Sitkinak (and East Sitkinak) was leased by a cattle company based in Montana (I think). They operated this ranch at a loss as a tax write-off, but they had to have at least one salaried employee to keep the operation from being considered abandoned. The company avoided this situation by hiring one of the Coasties to fill the position of Ranch Manager. There was no real job description, nor a definition of duties or responsibilities. The manager sent in a letter once a month to the home office with a report of what he had done the previous month and the number of hours he put in. Eventually a paycheck would come back.

The position was sort of inherited. When the manager rotated off the island he would "hire" one of his buddies as his replacement. I ascended to this lofty position in May.

There were approximately 300-400 head of cattle free-roaming on the island in two separate herds. They fed on what grass grew in the short summer and on the kelp & seaweed that washed up on the beach. The owners were supposed to send in a barge-load of feed sometime in the summer, but the year I was there it did not happen. There were also two cattle horses on East Sitkinak that had been roaming free for about 5 years,

Due to a shipping strike, Kodiak had a shortage of fresh meat. The Air Station contacted me requesting that I sell them some cows. I wrote a letter to the cattle company and said that if I did not hear to the contrary, I would assume I had permission. The Air Station sent out a helicopter and several experienced hunters. We shot about five fat young cows. By using the station front loader to lift the carcasses the Air Station personnel performed a rough field butchering operation. As the cows were cut apart, the meat was wrapped in large sheets of waxed paper and plastic. Then it was placed in a large basket. When all the meat had been processed, the helicopter rapidly ascended with the basket suspended below it. They went high enough to quick-freeze the meat and then proceeded home to the awaiting empty meat lockers at the Air Station. I took the money I collected and had it locked in the station safe. I used it to pay the crewmembers when they worked at the ranch, doing such chores as fence repair, or "swamping" out the manure from the barn.

Now I turned my attention to the horses. I thought it would be a fine thing to have them on our island so we could ride them. We had no boats, so there was no way to get across the lagoon that separated the two islands. The Air Station had told me that a helicopter could make a "training flight" if I could immobilize the horses. I then contacted the Alaska State Wildlife office, and they loaned me a dart rifle with several tranquilizer darts with the proper dosage to put a horse to sleep. Various crew members volunteered to build a corral. Sitkinak had no trees, but the beaches were littered with many, many logs that had broken loose from the timber rafts that were towed from Alaska to Seattle.

After the corral was completed, phase two of the operation was launched and was a total success. When the horses recovered from their tranquilizer shot, they were in the corral with many new friends offering carrots, apples and sugar cubes. Now we only needed saddles, bridles, etc. so we could become equestrians. Somehow, some unnamed friends in Kodiak did obtain this equipment from the Navy's riding stables. I never really questioned the details and was most grateful to receive them.

Later, ET3 Tom O'Conner wanted to build a barn (shelter) for the horses, again utilizing more of the driftwood logs. He wanted to do it entirely by hand (no power tools). This was something that practically the entire crew threw themselves into. It was a good exercise in ingenuity to lift the heavy logs into position as the walls got higher. Much manual labor was involved.

The actual design was a double-walled structure with the two foot space between the walls filled with moss, mud, and kelp for insulation. The roof was two layers of logs laid at right angles with moss and kelp insulation between the log layers. There was no door, but the open entryway was a simple maze of log walls positioned to keep any wind from directly blowing into the interior. We even had the CO down there with his shirt off pushing logs up a ramp under the direction of a junior petty officer. If this had been assigned as an official duty, there most likely would have been a mutiny!

Another all-hands project took place in the spring when the salmon were fighting up the stream beside the ranch house to return to their birthplace to lay their eggs. The problem was that when the road from the beach to the station was built, it crossed the stream. Instead of building a bridge, it crossed over a pair of culverts. The upstream path ended for the salmon in a pool below the culverts. Since the culverts were about 8 foot above the pool, the salmon could not complete their journey. We took it upon ourselves to carry these fish by hand from the pool across the road and releasing them upstream above the road. This was backbreaking work, and that stream was cold. It was incredible to see these huge fish fighting their way upstream, and where the water was shallow, they literally crawled over the wet rocks. The banks of the stream were lined with bald eagles who feasted on the fish that were unable to continue their journey.

Mr. Lynch (our CO) was the most capable young officer I ever had the pleasure of serving under. He had an easy style of command and was very much aware of the pressures of restricted duty on his crew. I believe I have already mentioned his policy of granting Holiday Routine every time the sun was shining.

Mr. Lynch had the feeling and belief that when a man was in his quarters, he was in a place of escape from our drab and boring life. Mr. Lynch had a respect for the dignity of each man under his command. For this reason, I had much admiration for him and hoped I could demonstrate the same respect for my subordinates.

On another occasion, we were graced one Sunday morning by the unannounced informal visit to the station by a staff officer from Juneau. This individual arrived by small aircraft and landed on the airstrip. He wandered down to the barracks, entered, and was upset when he observed some people were still in bed; while others had gotten up, and had gone to the messdeck for coffee and/ or breakfast without "squaring away their personal spaces". (Translation: they left their beds unmade!)

In addition. Most of these casual diners were not in the full and complete proscribed uniform. This staff officer was outraged and loudly expressed his displeasure at the station's slothness to Mr. Lynch. Our skipper informed this individual that it was Sunday morning on a restricted station and the condition of the station was of no real concern to this visitor.

Once a year the station had an annual resupply by a series of barges that delivered any and all heavy items such as new diesel engine or generator, the majority of a year's supply of commissary dry stores, diesel fuel, jet engine fuel, gasoline, lub oil, etc. Included in this shipment was a year's supply of canned soft drinks and canned beer for the crew. (Each Friday, the cook issued to all hands their week's ration of beverages.) We also received building material for station upkeep and projects. The make up of this shipment was from a list submitted by the department heads and crew on board the previous July. In another words, the previous crew, determined what they thought we would like to have or need. I missed out on this annual event, as the resupply mission took place while I was on my mid-tour leave.

I must say, the departed crew did us rotten in regards to the beverage selection. There were no Coca Colas, Pepsi Colas, Seven-Up or any other popular drinks in the shipment. We had primarily the Shasta line of flavors like grape, raspberry/blackberry, and crème soda. There was a lot of discontent and unhappiness over the poor selection. I added to the conflict by having a friend on Kodiak send me (in a plain brown wrapped package two cases of Pepsi Cola. On Friday I would go to the messdeck with a six-pack of Pepsi concealed under my jacket. When I left, I would openly flaunt this six-pack and would be besieged by, "Where did you get the Pepsi??"

My reply to the effect that "Cookie" just gave them to me would start a stampede to a bewildered "Cookie" with everyone demanding that they be given a six pack of Pepsi also. The more that Ortega tried to explain there were NO cans of Pepsi available and never had been, the louder he was berated.

Before I openly let people see me carrying Pepsi Colas from the messdeck, I used to throw an empty can in the trashcan in the junior petty officer's rooms and listen to the perplexed queries and denials of having access to Pepsi Colas. I guess I was at times somewhat of an instigator for discord.

I was eligible to take my mid-tour leave in July. I had heard rumors that the AirSta was sending a C-130 to the factory near Atlanta for overhaul and rehab. I figured that if I could obtain a seat on this flight I could save myself a whole heap of travel expenses, so I checked to find out the date it was departing and if I could be included in the manifest, I was told that not only could I fly to Atlanta, they would even detour out to Sitkinak and pick me up..... (It is amazing how far a few cows will go!!) When I climbed on board I found I was sharing my flight with about a dozen other passengers going on leave as I was. We, also, had about 30 some odd Malemute and Husky dogs of various ages. These belonged to people at Kodiak that were soon to be transferred. They were taking advantage of this flight to ship their dogs home for to take them on a commercial flight was very expensive. We also had boxes of furniture that the non-rated married personnel were shipping home as they were ineligible for government-paid household goods shipment. The entire rear bulkhead (where the loading ramp was) was covered by a deck-to-overhead stack of fresh-frozen King Crab that was being ferried down to CG Air Facility Elizabeth City, NC. Evidently there were others that engaged in barter! The bulk of the space in the cargo hold was filled with a wrecked CG helicopter that was being taken to "E-City" for a rebuild job.

The crew chief gave me a quick briefing. Since the C-130 was being turned in for overhaul they had stripped it of all safety and survival gear. We had no parachutes. Even if we had them, we could not use them as the rear jump door was blocked by all the cargo, and if we jumped out the side doors we would be leaping into the inboard propellers! I casually asked what had had happened to

the helo. They explained that as it was lifting off a cross-wind gust blew it into the tail of the aircraft parked next to it.

"Oh", I said, "And what happened to that aircraft?"

"Well," the reply was, "The tail assembly was pretty well chewed up. We patched it back together and we are taking it to the Lockheed plant in Georgia to be rebuilt."

With this piece of info, I decided there was nothing else I wanted to know about the aircraft I was in. Needless to say, we did NOT fall out of the sky.

I found the crew was roughly divided into two camps. One group were hunting and shooting enthusiasts while the opposing school was anti-gun in their feelings. "Guns are EVIL, shooting is wrong, and hunting is immoral."

I must admit that hunting on Sitkinak was very limited; the only game was the ptarmigan and the Canadian geese that summered there. I personally do not hunt, but thoroughly enjoy shooting at targets and just "plinking". When I arrived, I found the "shooters" were into large caliber guns and hand-loading. I also found there was a District-provided case of .22 cal. long rifle ammo for "morale shooting". I was the only .22 shooter, so I had my work cut out for me to dispose of the backlog and try to keep up with the ammo that was provided every quarter. New guns were very inexpensive, so I complemented my Ruger Single-Six .22 long rifle/.22 magnum convertible pistol with a new Marlin .22 caliber lever-action "Mountie".

My favorite "shooting gallery" was the dump. The best target was the unopened cans of stale outdated Black Label beer. When hit, a can would fly into the air, spewing beer spray in all directions as it spun from the escaping liquid. As it danced in the air, it became a very elusive target to hit before it fell back to the ground. I became very proficient with my pistol. I also bought a cap & ball black powder Colt .36 replica pistol. I really enjoyed playing with this gun, and my admiration for those in the past that used this type of weapon in combat greatly increased.

I generally carried my .22 pistol (loaded with .22 magnum bullets and the .22 long rifle lever action rifle with me whenever I was engaged in ranch work. The guns were totally unnecessary, but I felt they added to the "atmosphere".... Then, one day I discovered tracks on the beach! A Kodiak bear had swum across the seven mile channel from Kodiak, killed a cow, and dragged it back into the water. I never found any carcass, so must assume the bear took it back to Kodiak with him. I don't know what I would have done if I ever encountered a bear. The weapons I carried would not have been any more to him than a mosquito bite. I do know that a pair of Marines on Navy Base Kodiak had emptied their M-16 clips into a bear, but the bear killed both of them before he bled to death from the multiple minor non-lethal wounds. Fortunately, I never had to face this situation.

One weekend we had a commercial fishing boat anchor off the beach area, and the crew came ashore to visit. Under an Alaskan law, commercial fishing was prohibited on Sunday. The fishermen wanted to have an opportunity to take a fresh water hot shower, to have a change in menu, and maybe to sleep in a bed that did not move about. We accommodated them and also replenished their cigarette and beer supply. In return, they offered to take their boat out Sunday afternoon and make one sweep with their nets and give us their catch. We took the dump truck and lined the bed with heavy plastic sheets and proceeded to the beach with it and the front loader. With that single sweep of nets we completely filled the truck with fresh fish of all sorts. We had another "All Hands Evolution" at the station as we cleaned and prepped this load of fish for freezing in our walk-in freezers. All this fresh fish was a welcome addition to our menu.

One of our junior ETs was an interesting character. He was extremely intelligent, but had the common sense on a level of maybe a five year old! He was called "Jeebie" which was shortened

from "the "Heebie-Jeebies". This nickname was given to him as it was the feeling we sometimes got as we observed his total lack of common safety precautions. The previous senior ETs had forbidden him from working in the Transmitter Building as it was feared that he would electrocute himself or a co-worker in that high-power environment. Chief Harper and I went along with this restriction after we had observed his work habits.

Once, when we were preparing for the CO's Weekly Inspection, I assigned Jeebie to sweep, mop, and wax the hallway outside the ET spaces. We had heavy scuff marks on the deck, and he asked me how he should remove them. I was busy and simply told him to go to see the engineers, get some gasoline in a bucket, and use it on a rag to clean up the marks before he buffed the floor. Jeebie heard only three words: "**Gasoline**" "**Clean**" "**Buff**"

A few minutes later I heard Mr. Mellott rebuking Jeebie in a rather loud tone of voice. It seemed that Jeebie had taken a mop bucket of gasoline, poured it on the deck, and was preparing to use the electric buffer to give the marks a thorough cleaning! Fortunately, it was pretty cold in that unheated passageway and the gasoline did not give off any fumes. With slightly different circumstances, almost the entire Operations department could have vanished in a big noisy fireball!

Many of the crew started to grow beards as soon as they arrived. One of our senior petty officers was one of these beard-growers. He went on to state that he would not shave or even trim his beard until he returned home. His was just about the bushiest nest of hair I have ever seen adorning a human face. We first class petty officers decided that his appearance with this facial tangled mess on his face among civilized people was a disgrace and insult to all Coasties. However, we also felt that we had to (sort of) honor his no-shave vow. We were faced with a real moral dilemma.

The night before his departure, our extremely short "short-timer" bearded gnome over-celebrated his impending departure and passed out. As we had also been toasting his departure, our judgment was not filled with clarity. In regards to his beard, we decided that a compromise was in order. We shaved one side of his face! The next morning he had to make the decision as to whether to travel half-shaven or to complete the job before he boarded the Kodiak Airways plane. He returned to civilization with a clean-shaven face.

ETC Harper was another beard grower, though he kept his neatly trimmed. Very early one morning in October or November he came to my room and woke me up. It seemed that he wanted to borrow a chambray shirt, a pair of "dungos", and a white "dixie cup" white hat from me. At this point in time, Chief Petty Officers wore khaki uniforms. I was befuddled and confused, but when I turned on my lamp I was shocked. Chief Harper had completely shaved his beard off. (By now we had been here seven or eight months and most of the people who were on station when we arrived had departed, so there were only three people who could actually remember what he looked out without a beard.) He planned to suddenly just appear at quarters as if he were a newly arrived crew member. He did so and the crew almost went crazy trying to figure how in the heck this new man arrived on the island. We had not had an incoming flight in over a week, and there certainly had not been a landing last night. There was so much confusion that no one even noticed that Chief Harper was not present for quarters.

Oh happy day...on the 19th of October, Seventeenth District sent a message with my advance transfer orders. Surprise, surprise, I was going to LorSta Estartit, Spain. The official set of orders was received on the 23rd of October. I could actually see the light at the end of the tunnel. Now channel fever set in, and one went around saying things like, "I'm so short I can walk under a snake!" "I haven't got time to start reading any books!" The wit of short timers is amazing. When we arrived many months ago, we had given to us a piece of twine with 52 knots in it. Each Saturday we were

supposed to cut off one knot. This was to help us know how much time we had left before we could leave. The old timers used to delight in showing us how much longer our string were when compared to theirs...

Actually, we did not have a guaranteed departure date. Our rotation date was not necessarily on the anniversary of our arrival. Departure date was based on whether or not your replacement was on board (in the case of senior petty officers) or if the replacement was definitely enroute in the case of junior petty officers and non-rated people. I left before any of my three arrival companions as I was not being directly replaced. Chief Harper, Doc Kavlic, and Cookie Ortega had to have their reliefs on board and all the formalities of relief being observed. As of 17th Jan, I had completed my year and Mr. Dickerson said I could leave on the next outbound aircraft. I got on the radio and started trying to get a flight out ASAP. The weather was several notches below miserable, and as much as I wanted to get home, I wanted to actually get there and not end up on the side of some Kodiak mountain. My friends at Kodiak Airways knew of my agitation and promised they would be out just as soon as the weather was suitable, Finally, of the morning of Jan, 28, 1973 Kodiak Airways told me to get my gear to the runway; they had a plane on its way to pick me up!!! What more can I say, I'm on my way to Florida to be with my family and we all are going to Spain.....

GOODBY, SNOW & ICE ! HELLO, SUNSHINE STATE ! HOLA, SUNNY SPAIN !!!

These are the people on Sitkinak who saw me leave in Jan '73

Personnel are listed in order of rotation (with exception of CO & XO)

| | | Tour Dates | | Tour Dates | |
|------|----------------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------------|
| LTJG | D.R. Dickmann | Apr 72-73 | | | |
| CWO2 | D.U. Duren | Jul 72-73 | | | |
| ET1 | R.L. Nahikian | Jan 72-73 | SA | H.H. Stuart | Jul 72-73 |
| CSI | M.N. Ortega | Jan 72-73 | SA | K.C. Lee | Jul 72-73 |
| HM1 | D.L. Kavlic | Jan 72-73 | SA | D.R. West | Jul 72-73 |
| ETC | R.D. Harper | Jan 72-73 | ET3 | E.D. Jones | Sep 72-73 |
| ET3 | R.T. Hicks | Feb 72-73 | ET3 | E.E. Polmateer | Sep 72-73 |
| SK3 | W.H. Atkins | Mar 72-73 | SA | T.A. Cone | Sep 72-73 |
| ENC | E.M. Farrow | Apr 72-73 | FA | J.R. Alton | Sep 72-73 |
| EN1 | C.R. Shoemaker | Apr 72-73 | FA | R.G. Johns | Sep 72-73 |
| BMC | V.D. Kroupa | May 72-73 | SNEW | J.R. Kent | Oct 72 -73 |
| ET3 | T.P. O'Conner | Jun 72-73 | SA | E.T. Clark | Dec 72-73 |
| RM1 | J.H. Humphrey | Jun 72-73 | SA | R.G. Ekler | Nov 72-73 |
| EM2 | W.D. Fay | Jul 72-73 | SN | A.D. Betz | Dec 72-73 |
| DC3 | W.R. Waqonner | Jul 72-73 | SNET | D.C. Pierce | Jan 73-74 |

Bob "Nik" Nahikian
 ETC USCG (ret)
 Melrose, Florida Jun, 2007
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ADDEDUM

There are a number of photos available at: www.kadiak.org/ and click onto [Sitkinak Island](#)
Abandoned USCG Loran Station, aborted AC&W site. Most were taken after the station had been closed and abandoned.

Note: "KADIAK" is NOT a typo ! Bob Nahikian