

**Excerpts from manuscript written by Les Nyland, Sr. "Three Score and Ten: Story of My Life (2011).**

"In 1949, I received my orders to report to the Iroquois, a ship that would take me to the United States Coast Guard LORAN Transmitting Station, Niihau. Niihau, is a privately owned island 12 miles long and 8 miles wide, lying west of Kauai.

When we arrived at Niihau, there was no docking facility. *(Note from August 16, 1949 Operations Report, Photos indicate clearly the lava shelves surround the entire cove. Coral reefs and lava shelves prevent safe landings elsewhere around the island.)* We had to go in by small boats and land on a sandy beach. There were whales around the ship. They would rise way up out of the water and fall back in with a huge splash. When they lowered the 22 foot lifeboat into the water and said "Get in", I was ready to quit and go home. This was madness. They required us to put on life jackets. This precaution would later save my life, and we started out for the beach, a half-mile away.

The boat was loaded with wooden crates of supplies, tires, 7 men, my seabag and lots of stuff I don't remember or didn't even know at the time. To save labor and time, they towed us with a motor lifeboat.

The surf was under-estimated and before we could turn around and go back to the ship, we were swamped. We were thrown into the water, caught up in the 15 to 20 foot breakers and forced under for what seemed like an eternity. I held on to my seabag and my handbag using them to protect me from the crashing wooden crates, oars, etc. It was bedlam. The surf was pounding us, making it almost impossible for rescue. The motor lifeboat would wait for a lull in the waves, then rush in and grab someone and rush out again before the next wave. When they came in for me, I tried to get my seabag into the boat. Another guy tried to help me. We couldn't lift it as we were exhausted and it had taken on a lot of water. The Chief Boson mate in charge said, "Let it go; we got to get out of here now." I said another goodbye; this time to my worldly possessions as my seabag sunk out of sight to the bottom. We were in the water approximately 45 minutes and not being a strong swimmer, I owed my life to the life jacket I was wearing and Providence looking out for some guys whose "time had not run out."

Time went by slowly while stationed on the island. "We had movies; we had good food; we didn't wear uniforms; we went swimming; we hunted wild pigs (the meat was donated to the local population); we tried to keep busy. "

"Our C.O. wanted to keep good tabs on us. One way was for him to put himself in charge of the first aid kit. This didn't seem fair because things happened that we didn't always want him to know about. For example, I cut my leg badly running to launch a kite I had built. Then a week later I caught two little wild pigs, probably only a day or 2 old and one bit me badly."

Christmas came and went without a tree, snow and loved ones. It was just another lonely day in the South Pacific. I was very homesick as this was my first Christmas away from home. The song "White Christmas" was quite new then. Ever since, when I hear "White Christmas" it takes me back to Niihau, 1949 and the tears just can't be held back."

#### **Other notable events while on Niihau**

##### **Changing of the LORAN Receiving Antenna Light Bulb:**

One of my responsibilities was to climb, and replace the light bulb on the LORAN receiving antenna mounted on the 120 ft tower. I was the only one given this responsibility at the time. It was not a job for anyone with the fear of heights.

##### **Niihau luau**

Niihau is a privately owned island which was licensed to the U.S. Coast Guard by the property owner, Mr. Aylmer Robinson, dated 25 April, 1944 (U.S. Coast Guard Operational Data Report, Part II, 16 August, 1949.) We were greatly honored when we were invited to a Niihau luau where "coasties" were given lei/necklaces which were locally handmade with shells only found on Niihau [https://niihauheritage.org/shell\\_lei\\_authenticity/](https://niihauheritage.org/shell_lei_authenticity/)