

A Journey to War: One Coast Guardsman's World War II Experience Serving Aboard the USS *LST-19*

By QM 3/c Walter Nasmyth, USCGR



A Journey to War:

My journey to war began on a cloudy day in early April of 1944. It began in Port Townsend, Washington where four full companies of men had just completed a seamanship and signal school at the Coast Guard Training Station. At 1400 hours we were mustered on the grinder in dress blues with all our gear. Our seabags were loaded on a truck and taken to the ferry landing at the opposite end of town.

We were formed into loose ranks and marched down the main street of Port Townsend to the ferry slip. The town's people came out on the sidewalks to see us off and wish us well on our tour of duty, for they knew we were on our way overseas.

We boarded the ferry and began the cruise through the Straits of Juan De Fuca to Edmonds, Washington, the ferry landing, where we would board buses and be taken to a restaurant for our evening meal. It was then back on the buses to be transported to the King Street Railroad Station where we boarded a troop train for the second leg of our journey.

The train left Seattle, Washington at 2100 hours and arrived in Portland, Oregon at 0700 hours next morning. For a trip of some 186 miles the train had to stop at every telephone pole in order to take that long for the trip. We referred to the train as the milk run for it made so many

stops. We were in Portland for just one hour, then back aboard and we were on our way to San Francisco, California.

The train stopped at Dorris, California, for 15 minutes and several of the older men made a flying trip into town to buy booze. They got back to the train just in time for the train was already moving when they jumped aboard. Upon our arrival in San Francisco, we were herded onto buses and transported to Treasure Island. At that time Treasure Island was a naval staging area for replacements in the Pacific Theater. It was a real experience to be stationed there for men were crammed into every nook and cranny available.

We were assigned to four high bunks and warned of the thefts taking place on the base and told not leave anything of value in our seabags. One fellow in the group said he had taken care of that problem for he had secured his seabag top with a dog chain and padlock.

Following early chow the entire base was given liberty in San Francisco and Oakland. It seemed there was a certain gang that was assaulting servicemen and their wives and girl friends. We were told to go ashore in no less than groups of five and if any gang members were encountered they were to be dealt with summarily. The gang members could be identified by a certain tattoo on their right hand between the thumb and forefinger.

Enough about liberty in San Francisco, except to say, to the best of my knowledge the gang problem never resurfaced during the rest of the war. When we returned to Treasure Island from liberty the fellow who had chained his seabag found someone had cut the bottom out of the seabag and removed everything of value. The rest of the second day was spent drawing small stores to fill out our seabag requirements. Those who had no long underwear were forced to purchase them for duty in the South Pacific. The excuse for the longies was to thwart the spies, they would think we were going north. Some thinking.

The following day fifty of us were mustered on the grinder and loaded on buses. We were going overseas but we knew not where or how. The three busloads of "shallow water sailors" went directly to the San Francisco waterfront where we were unloaded and told to walk through the warehouses to the pier and to watch out for wharf rats. They were really serious for we saw the God-awfulest rats you could ever conjure up in your wildest nightmare. When we arrived at the dock much to our surprise, a Navy ship of the line was moored to the dock.

A CPO informed us that we were to be passengers aboard the heavy cruiser for transport to Pearl Harbor. We were told our seabags were already aboard and stowed around the stack on the hanger deck, wherever the hell that was. We were also told there was no room for quarters so we were to sleep among our sleeping bags.

As we boarded the ship we saluted the national ensign and then the quarterdeck, we were then led to the hanger deck. When all fifty men were aboard, the cruiser set special sea detail and prepared to get underway. Mooring lines were singled up, then all lines were cast off and the ship backed into Frisco Bay.

The next order piped was, "all passengers below until further notice." The ship's crew was piped to quarters in undress blues and would remain at formation until we cleared the bay. Marine guards were posted at all hatches to keep the passengers below deck as we passed under the Golden Gate Bridge and put out to sea.

The captain of the ship had no feelings for the men forced below or the fact that it just might be their last view of the States. The ship was well out to sea and rolling nicely before we were allowed on deck. Shortly after we were allowed on deck chow was piped and we went below and got in the chow line. Several of the men were already seasick and one man threw up in his tray full of food a most unnerving situation.

After chow those of us in good condition checked out the ship and located our nest for the next few nights among the seabags. During the night there was little sleep as the seasick men climbed over everyone to reach the rail and donate to Davey Jones. One man did not make it and threw up in the stack of seabags. Gad, what a stench.

The crew's head was something else. It consisted of a steel trough about 25 feet long with adjustable sliding seats and salt water running through the trough at all times. One of the ship's crew was always seated at the head of the trough and when all the seats were occupied he would wad a handful of toilet paper and touch a match to it and drop the burning paper in the trough. The seated men reacted like a row of ducks as they popped up off the seats. The crewman thought it was hilarious until someone pulled the same thing on him.

Following morning chow we were mustered with the deck force and assigned to work parties. While the ship had been stateside it had been painted and new battleship linoleum installed on the deck of all the gun-tubs. The work party to which I was assigned had the dubious honor of removing the paint from all the brass dogs on all the ready boxes. There were at least ten zillion brass dogs on a heavy cruiser.

The other work parties were detailed to scrape all the linoleum off the decks of the gun-tubs and give it the deep six. There was to be as little flammable material around the gun-tubs as possible. The shipyards were working on a cost plus basis so the linoleum was installed for reasons of profit, now it came off and over the side.

I made friends with a signalman 1/c and he took me on a tour of the signal bridge with its 36-inch arc type signal lights used for visual signals. The signalman told me, "oh you Coasties will be on a milk run to the states and back." Later when I saw the ship at Saipan I sent a PVT message to the signalman, "some milk run," and signed it, the Coastie.

The third day at sea the cruiser launched the Seagull (a seaplane) from the ships launching boom and then retrieved the plane while underway a well executed operation. The pilot of the seagull was a regular Navy flying chief. When we reached Pearl Harbor we left the Cruiser and boarded a ferry that took us to Ford Island where we boarded buses for transport to the Aloha Tower in Honolulu, where we would remain until assigned to a ship.

Then came the day when all temporary personnel were mustered on the main deck of Aloha Tower and given our ship assignments. People were assigned to APAs, troop transports such as the U.S.S. *Leonard Wood*, and to several LSTs and other Coast Guard-manned ships. The following morning we were mustered on the Tower Lanai with all our gear and then we proceeded to the dock to be picked up by our assigned ship's smallboat. Three of us climbed aboard the LCVP from the *LST-19* and we were on our way to war.

Not one of us knew what an LST was or what they looked like so we were in for a real surprise. The LCVP headed out into Pearl Harbor where we passed first line ships of all shapes and sizes including many troop transports. Then we saw a line of the ugliest things

afloat. We asked the cox'n just what they were and he told us they were LSTs . The LCVP headed toward Ford Island and straight for the rustiest one of the bunch. Great God, it was then we saw the number 19 on the thing's bow. The front of the thing was open and it had its tongue hanging out on the beach resembling some prehistoric animal. I thought to myself it was some kind of buoy snatcher, but when we went aboard the bos'n clued us in at once, and in no uncertain terms.

Within 30 minutes from the time we reported aboard we had been issued chipping hammers and told to chip the rust off the anchor chain that lay stretched on the beach. What an initiation into the amphibious force!



LST exploding during the West Loch disaster in May, 1944.

On May 21, 1944 at 1500 hours all hell broke loose in a group of LSTs nested in West Loch, Pearl Harbor. An accident occurred on an LST unloading ammunition that resulted in a horrendous explosion that sprayed flaming debris over the LSTs adjacent to it, which in turn exploded and spread the fire to the ship moored to it. In all six LSTs and two or three LCTs and numerous smallcraft were lost that afternoon. The loss of life among the troops and crews on board the ships was only exceeded by the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. The loss of life and equipment was the best-kept secret of the war. The men who witnessed the holocaust will never forget that afternoon.

By the way, the name of the heavy cruiser that transported us to Pearl Harbor was the ill-fated U.S.S. *Indianapolis*.



The USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35), off California, 1 May 1944, after overhaul and repainting with pattern camouflage. Naval Historical Center Photograph, Photo #: NH 83607.

History of the U.S.S. *L.S.T. 19*:

The "19" was commissioned on May 15, 1943, one of the first LSTs placed in service that was built by the Dravo shipyard in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. The "19" was assigned to the Pacific Theater of War during WWII. The first operation the *LST-19* participated in was the unopposed landing of Canadian troops on Kiska, an island in the Aleutians. That operation took place in August of 1943. The second operation the "19" participated in was the capture and occupation of the Gilbert Islands which included assaults on Makin and Tarawa in November of 1943.



Left: D-Day June 15, 1944 -- Assault on Saipan underway. LVTAs assembling at point of departure -- 0630 hours.

May 21, 1944 the "19" was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, Hawaiian Islands, with the bow doors open and the ramp lowered taking on reserve troops for the assault on Guam, Mariana, Islands. At approximately 1500 hours an explosion rocked the harbor and fire broke out on an LST nested in West Loch, Pearl Harbor.

The "19's" crew witnessed the death and destruction that occurred on that bright and sunny afternoon. While the explosions continued the "19" received orders from the command ship to commence unloading troops and equipment immediately. By next morning the

"19" had been reloaded with troops designated for the assault on Saipan, Marianas Islands scheduled for June 15, 1944. Operation Forager took place only one day late, which the time was made up during the voyage to Eniwetok, Marshall Islands.

The third operation in which the "19" participated was of course, operation Forager, the assault and occupation of the Marianas Islands, June 15, 1944. The "19's" LCVPs led our assault troops into Blue Beach II, Saipan, as part of the first wave of assault forces to strike Saipan.

Right: Preparing to launch LCG-357 from main deck of LST-19, D-Day plus 3 -- June 18, 1944 during Operation Forager.



On July 24, 1944 the "19's" LCVPs led the first wave of assault troops that landed on the beaches of Tinian Island.



The "19's" last operation was the assault and capture of the North Caroline Islands. September 15, 1944 the "19's" LCVPs again led the first wave assault troops that landed on the beaches of Peleliu, Palau Islands. A repeat performance was accomplished a little later on Anguar, another South Pacific Island paradise in the Western Carolines.

Left: LCT-357 launched from the main deck of LST-19, June 18, 1944 during the invasion of the Marianas.

Assigned to a service squadron in the Caroline Islands from October 1944 until January, 1945 at which time the ship broached and became impaled on coral heads on Purple Beach, Peleliu for thirteen miserable days and nights.

Following temporary repairs in a floating drydock located at Kessel Roads, Babelthup Island, the "19" headed back toward Pearl Harbor with a sub-chaser as escort. Two days out of Ulithi the sub-chaser blew an engine and the "19" wound up towing the escort at a rousing speed of 3 1/2 knots. At long last the ship made Pearl Harbor just one day prior to the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The shock of his death was devastating to all hands. A few days in Pearl Harbor then the "19" headed for the Coast Guard Repair Base, San Pedro, California. The ship left Pearl Harbor April 14, 1945 and arrived Long Beach, California on April 29, 1945.

During the months of May, June and July the ship was repaired and converted to an L.S.T.H. and returned to duty in the Pacific Theater of War. The "19" was nearing Pearl Harbor when the Japanese surrendered. The ship had been converted to an L.S.T.H. in anticipation of the great number of casualties expected during the assault on the Japanese mainland. All hands said a fervent prayer of thanks for Harry Truman and the guts to drop the atom bomb.

The "19" was on occupation duty in the Far East from October thru December of 1945.

The USS *LSTH-19* was struck from the Navy roster on May 1, 1946. On December 5, 1947 the "19" was sold for scrap, the end of a gallant lady.



Walter R Nasmyth QM 3/c U.S.C.G.R.

The Initiation:

Operation Forager, the assault and occupation of the Marianas Islands, had come to a victorious conclusion.

The *LST-19* had been reassigned to the Third Amphibious [Fleet] to replace an LST damaged by a shore battery at Saipan. We formed up the new Task Unit and headed south bound for the Solomon Islands. The voyage was quite uneventful until we neared the equator.



Orders from CDR Whiteside's ship were that any initiation at the equator was to be in the form of work to prepare the ship for the coming operation. What a joke that turned out to be.

Left: Pollywog hazing aboard LST-19, Longitude 162 degrees 16 minutes East ---- Latitude 0000. What happy memories of crossing the equator -- enroute for the invasion of the western Carolines.

The night before we reached the equator Davy Jones was piped aboard by Joseph R. Jennings SM 2/c. I still have the notes he made for the speech he gave over the P.A. system. The notes have faded with age just as most of us have.

The next twenty-four hours can only be compared to hell night at some college fraternity house. We were rousted out of our bunks during the night and taken below to the tank deck where a Kangaroo Court had convened and placed charges against every pollywog aboard. The specific charge against me was that as a quartermaster striker I had made a statement that, "running lights had four legs and all good seamen knew they only had two legs." After we were duly charged we were allowed to return to our bunks. The shellbacks made certain we did not sleep too soundly for they rousted us out at regular intervals throughout the rest of the night.

At 1000 hours the fun began, we were hazed into line and forced to run around the main deck and jump over opened escape hatch covers where one of the shellbacks waited with a double stitched roll of canvas that had been soaked in salt water for several days. If someone missed or failed to properly clear one of the hatch covers he was assisted by a whack with the canvas shillelagh. See photos of the hazing.

At Latitude 0000 degrees and Longitude 162 degrees 16 minutes east, we were taken below to the tank deck where the charges were read and the sentence pronounced. Then the "fun" really began in earnest.

The first indignity we were to suffer was to be made to strip naked. We were then blindfolded and forced to kneel and kiss the royal baby's butt, who turned out to be the greased belly button of the fattest and hairiest shellback aboard ship, a most delightful experience. We were then thrown into a pool of saltwater that had been retained in a tarp.

When we were pulled out of the water half drowned we were then thrown on our backs and our bodies painted with everything from purple bismuth and merthiolate on our genitals, to yellow chromate paint in the hair we had left after the Royal Barber finished with us. After a dose of cod liver oil had been forced into our mouths we were placed on a chair and while a dozen people shouted charges at us we were subjected to electrical shocks. Not enough voltage to cause harm but enough to shock us.

The chair was made to collapse and allow us to slide into a pool of water and as we came up for air someone would shout, "what do you say," with no breath to answer we were again ducked under the water. That kept up until we reached the end of the tank and someone told us to yell "shellback." Which we did with gusto and the "fun" came to an end.

We were allowed to take a shower, which turned out to be saltwater. At that point we were thankful we had as little hair as we did for it was a real chore to get the yellow chromate out of it.

When we arrived at Guadalcanal it was evident that none of the ships had paid heed to CDR Whiteside's orders. It can be said that all pollywogs aboard the "19" earned their shellback certificates the hard way.

The Miracle Salvage Job:

Late December of 1944 the battle for Peleliu was winding down and the island was considered secured. The *LST-19* was still assigned to a service squadron that shuttled cargo from supply ships to the beach. We were beached on Purple Beach and all cargo had been off-loaded. We received orders from the beachmaster to take on assault troops for an Army landing on the island of Faes, a small atoll in the North Carolines.



QM 3/c Walter Nasmyth aboard *LST-19* taking soundings, Western Carolines, December, 1944.

When the troops and their equipment had been loaded the ship was secured for the night. Some of the officers, with the exception of the OD, went ashore to the officers' club on Peleliu. They returned to the ship sometime during the mid-to-four watch. The OD had me log them aboard and then we settled in for the rest of an uneventful tour of duty. When relieved of ship to at 0400 hours we went below to catch a few winks before the ship was to retract from the beach at high tide.

The crew was not piped to beaching stations until well past the flood tide and by that time the "19" had started to shift to port. I was on the starboard bridge wing at the time and saw someone on the LST on our starboard, to which we were moored, use a fire-axe to cut our quarter wire.

When the line parted the ship swung to port and in the blink of an eye we were impaled on coral heads. We lay broached on Purple Beach with coral heads through the ships hull and when the main and auxiliary engine rooms flooded the black gang was forced to abandon their stations. For thirteen miserable days and nights we remained on the beach with no power, no water and only cold rations. To this day I cannot drink grape fruit juice for that was the extent of our drinking water.

Of course the next order from the beach-master was to unload all troops and equipment immediately, which was easier said than done. With the the engines and generators shut down there was no power to open the bow doors and lower the ramp, an operation which had to take place in order to unload the troops and their equipment.

Regardless of the rantings of a one-star general on the beach, nothing could be done until the bow doors and ramp could be opened manually.

Photo taken from the bridge of *LST-19* indicating the angle of the ship to the beach.



The very first task for the crew was to spread foamite on all the fuel in the compartments below decks to prevent fire and the possibility of an explosion. The job ahead, to free the "19" from the coral heads, would become a Herculean effort by all hands. When the troops and their equipment had been unloaded the real work began, CDR Holmes, USN took command of the salvage operation from the beach.

It must be kept in mind that without power all material to come aboard had to be hoisted by hand for we had lost our cherry picker over the side during the first typhoon following the invasion. The first equipment to come aboard were gasoline-powered generators for welding and to provide light so work could continue after dark. The next to come aboard were jeep engines equipped with winches to be welded to the main deck where the most torque would be required. Then came (it seemed like miles) of wire rope that had to be made up with eye splices to connect to the kedge anchors with kanter shackles.



Our LCVP would beach and a 6,000 pound kedge anchor would be loaded aboard. The LCVP would then be shoved off the beach by a caterpillar tractor and get as close to the starboard side of the ship as water depth permitted. The small boat crew would attach the wire to the kedge anchor and then start backing seaward as the wire was paid out. When they reached the area where the kedge anchor was to be positioned they would lock the jeep powered winch aboard the ship, and the LCVP continued to back down until the anchor was pulled off the boat and into position.

LST-19 broached and high and dry, Purple Beach, Peleliu, Palau Islands, Western Carolines, December, 1944.

During all welding operations there had to be fire watches below deck at all times. Standing in the mixture of fuel and foamite was not a pleasant pastime. The constant work and lack of proper food and water took a toll on the crew. The crew was so tired they became careless. Many times someone would be standing in the bight of a line and pay no attention until someone yelled a warning. One line parted during the first kedging operation and struck a seaman across the legs. As luck would have it the man was not seriously injured. There was little rest for a mighty tired crew but at least the bridge-gang had to stand watches which turned out to be a respite.

During our time on the beach I made numerous entries in the quartermaster log that the ship was taking a terrific pounding from the surf. The waves would hit the ship broadside and the resultant spray would be great enough to reach the mast yardarms. My first assignment was to take soundings around the ship with a lead line and then make a drawing of how the reef lay under the ship. This would assist the crew when locating where the maximum effort would be required during the kedging operation.

Alfred Trom QM2/c and I set up a tide meter in the surf so as to determine exactly when the maximum high tide occurred. This turned out to be quit a chore as we were rolled about in the live coral by the surf and wound up raw and bloody.

At this point I should note that several of the crew members developed huge ulcerated boils on their bodies and extremities due to working in the mixture of fuel and foamite below decks. John Padur BM2/c had the worst case of ulcers one could ever imagine.

Meanwhile, back to the matter at hand. When the kedge anchors were in position and the tide was right CDR Holmes gave the order to commence kedging operations. The kedging continued for approximately thirty minutes but to no avail. We ceased the operation and it was back to square one.

LST-19 being shoved into a floating drydock at Kossil Roads, Babelthuap Island, Western Carolines, January, 1945.

The kedge anchors had to be repositioned and then wait for a higher tide. At that point CDR Holmes ordered a causeway brought in and positioned it between the port side of the ship and the beach. With one end against the ship, the end toward the beach had two



twenty- purchase blocks welded in place and the wire anchored on shore . The commander told us there was only one man in the Pacific Theater who could reeve a twenty purchase block system and he was on the commander's crew.

Prior to another attempt to refloat the ship all types of gasoline powered handy billy pumps were brought aboard to keep the ship afloat if and when it was free of the coral heads. At long last the tide was ideal and the commander brought in three D-8 cats to pull on the lines to the twenty purchase blocks and one with a bulldozer blade to push against the inboard end of the causeway.

When the operation began, the ship groaned as if in mortal pain and then suddenly heeled sharply to starboard. It was almost anti-climatic when the ship was winched and pushed into deep water. The entire crew was cheering and men on the beach were shouting as the ship slid into deep water. "Thank God we were at last afloat." We did not have to leave the ship half a world away from home. With all the handy billy pumps operating and all the water tight integrities closed below decks the seagoing tug *Munsey* came alongside and gave us fresh water, which almost caused a riot. The tug passed lines to the shouting and elated crew and then took us in tow. Little did we realize how tough the next few weeks would be.

When the ship was afloat CDR Holmes paid the "19's" crew quite a left-handed compliment. His exact words were: "this is the worst dressed and the best damned crew in the Pacific."

A long forty-eight hours later we were being nosed into a drydock at Kossel Roads, Babelthuap Island, when a Jap two-man sub was spotted.

What a coup if the sub could sink a floating drydock and an LST at the same time. We were heeled over to starboard so far our guns would not come to bear and we were approximately halfway into the drydock so none of the forward weapons could fire. The *Munsey* and other ships in the anchorage opened fire and resolved the problem *muy pronto*.

After many days in drydock the main engines and one auxiliary were operable. The portside screw shaft had a 2 1/2-inch whip which required the removal of two or three carrier bearings in the shaft alley in order to allow the shaft to rotate. When the engines were finally started the vibration of the shaft could be felt throughout the ship. When we would hit the sack the shaft would bounce us to sleep. The work had to be hurried as we were warned of an approaching typhoon with winds reaching a velocity of 186 knots. This was the great typhoon of February 1945 that wreaked havoc with the Pacific fleet.

With the storm approaching the "19" was pulled out of the drydock and anchored in approximately the center of the anchorage. We dropped the hook in 30 fathoms of water with 60 fathoms of chain to the bow anchor. As the storm increased in intensity the captain took over the bridge and all off duty bridge personnel were piped to the bridge. As midnight neared the storm was in its full blown glory. The blowing rain and seas had lowered the visibility to ground zero. I had just stepped out of the wheelhouse and started toward the port bridge wing when I saw a bright signal light coming up fast on our port quarter. I yelled at the captain and advised him of the ship coming up astern. His exact words were, Oh **** , and he made a dive for the wheelhouse and shouted, all engines ahead two thirds." The ship was not coming up on us, instead, we were dragging our anchor and drifting down on an anchored ship.

A little later the captain ordered the main anchor chain veered to 100 fathoms and before the night was through the anchor chain was veered to 115 fathoms. With both engines ahead one third we managed to maintain our position during the long hours until dawn. As the wind abated we were able to check out our position and found we had dragged our anchor almost 1,500 yards across the Kossel Roads anchorage. That was no easy feat without colliding with other ships at anchor.

As conditions improved we began to assess the damage throughout the anchorage. We were notified that during the night 10 PBM Mariner seaplanes had been driven onto the beach of the Jap held island of Babelthaup.

While in the anchorage we saw an LCI damaged when a Jap swam out from the island and tied a charge to the screw guards. From that time on all our lookouts were most vigilant during their night watches.

A few days passed then we took on some much needed supplies and left the anchorage headed for Ulithi, where we were scheduled to moor to an ARL to repair our generators and other needed repairs. We had just requested permission to enter the anchorage at approximately 0830 hours when we received a message from the control ship to standby, ships were leaving the harbor. As we lay "hove to" the ships started through the channel. First came the sub-chasers and DE's, then the destroyers. They fanned out and formed a screen for what was to follow. The next to come down the channel were the cruisers, both light and heavy and they were followed at longer intervals by the battleships. Next came the CVE's and

then the CV's followed by more DE's and frigates to cover the last ships until the task forces that were headed out to end the Japanese power in the Pacific once and for all were formed up. Never before or since have I been so impressed with the military might of the United States. It took until almost 1630 hours before we could enter the anchorage and go alongside the ARL.

At this time I would like to pay my respects to the best black-gang on any ship in the Pacific. While in drydock and again moored to the ARL the black-gang did an outstanding job of making repairs that made the ship operable enough to allow us to sail her back to Pearl Harbor.

A few days moored to the ARL (where I even had a jap watch repaired) then we took on supplies, fueled up and headed outward bound for Pearl Harbor escorted by a sub-chaser. A few days out of Ulithi the sub-chaser blew an engine and the "19" wound up towing her escort at the amazing speed of 3 1/2 knots.

Many days passed with the monotony broken only by the sighting of a line squall and the quartermaster on duty piping, "now hear this, showers on the main deck." The ship was not equipped with evaporators to augment our fresh water supply so it was a real treat to be able to take a fresh water shower on deck. Some of the old salts can remember just what saltwater soap did to ones body hair.

One bright and sunny afternoon as we neared our destination we were sighted and challenged by a land-based bomber. We answered the challenge, and then the pilot asked if we needed assistance. The bombers crew could see by our wake that we were not making any speed run. After many weeks and the miles traveled on our own the reply was an emphatic "negative, tks for asking," AR meaning (end of transmission). As we limped toward Pearl Harbor our silhouette and speed were enough for Aloha Tower to identify us. With our radio call signals flying we at last entered the anchorage where a tug took the sub-chaser in tow and we proceeded to our designated anchorage.

The brightness of our stay in Pearl Harbor was darkened by the death of our President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. We heard by radio that the President had died and the OD told me to lower the flag to half mast. Shortly thereafter a zero zero message was sent out for all ships in the harbor to two-block their ensigns. The message was signed 2 Fox 2, COMWESTSEAFRON, ADM Nimitz (translated -- Commander Western Sea Frontier Admiral Chester Nimitz, USN). I must explain that during wartime the flag on a man-o-war is never lowered, only in surrender.

While in Pearl Harbor we took time to take advantage of the great food and drink served by the many restaurants in Honolulu. Most of us made a stop at Battleship Max's to buy tailor made dungarees and purchase gifts for those left at home so long ago. It was then "anchors aweigh" and we were stateside bound with no escort.

Another long and boring voyage, then the sighting of the California coastline. Home was the sailor, home from the war, the stay would be brief but at long last we were home. When we attempted to enter the harbor at Long Beach we were met by an outgoing tide and with our speed we made little or no headway. At long last we made the harbor and the first order we received was , "anchor well offshore and unload your ammunition."

Shortly after the hook (as would be expected, a new crew member that came aboard in Pearl Harbor won the anchor pool) a gentleman from the U.S. Customs came aboard. He passed the word that if anyone aboard had any U.S. military weapons as souvenirs that person would be liable to a \$10,000 fine and 10 years on Goat Island. Following the gentleman's departure there were all kinds of plunk-plunks as souvenirs got the deep six.

Right: LST-19 in Long Beach harbor in April '45. This is what the ship looked like on her return from the Pacific Theatre.

When the ammunition had been off-loaded to an ammo barge, liberty was granted to all but a skeleton crew. What a liberty ! The following day the ship was moved to the Coast Guard repair base at San Pedro, California where it would be converted to an LSTH for the final assault on the Japanese mainland.



The long voyage was over and history would record the operations in which the LST-19 participated. A motto adopted by the crew had come to pass, "HOME ALIVE 'N FORTY FIVE," said it all.

To this day I feel the Coast Guard was remiss in its failure to award the crew of the 19 a commendation for the Miracle Salvage Job (as referred to by the U.S. Coast Guard Publicity Dept. Wash. D.C.) and their bulldog tenacity that brought their ship home.