

1961 1962

**THE ALC-50's****AB2996 and AB3000****...THE ABILITY TO PUT A CENTURION TANK ON A HOSTILE BEACH....****....SO THE STORY WAS TOLD....**

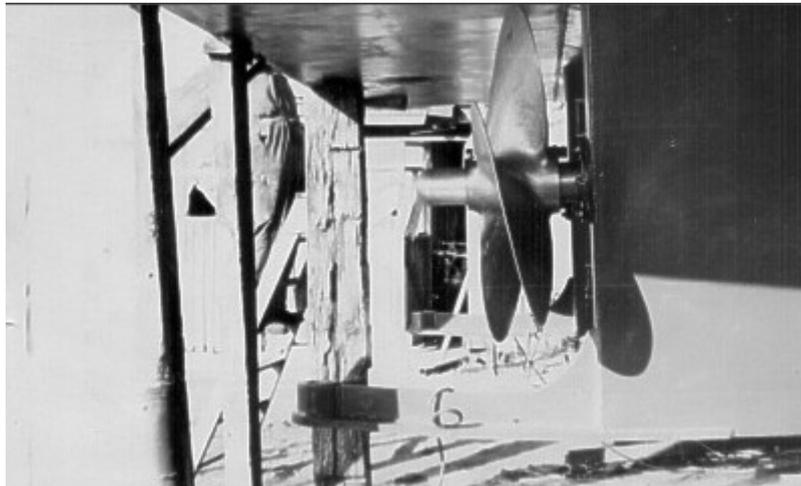
On arrival in Sydney Sue and I obtained a flat in Hurstville and had a good leave. My posting at Chowder Bay was as a Sgt. Navigator and the internal position was Wharfmaster but within three weeks the OC Capt. John Hughes sent myself and two Engineers to Devonport, Tasmania, where two totally new Australian Heavy Landing Craft were being built. Sue had become pregnant at this time so she went off to Adelaide to her parents, where her father was then posted.

We were booked in at the Formby Hotel in Devonport and after settling into the hotel we went to the Phoenix Shipbuilding Yard to inspect the very latest in Australian technology and design. My first impression was that the Australian Shipbuilding Commission had obtained a satellite photograph of a U.S. Army Landing Craft Utility at a distance of 100 miles, had the photo blown up to a reasonable scale and then had a design drawn up. Some unknown and abysmal bureaucrat in Canberra also stated that the ALC-50's would have a limited seagoing/multi-tasking capability. What this meant in the real world was that if the end user (us!) screwed up it would be because we operated outside the design limits of the craft. If, on the other hand, we were successful in carrying out our assigned missions then it would be well within the design "limitations". (We would use the ALC-50's well outside the design "limitations"). Looking at the monstrosity that was being built on the slipway, a quotation from Victor Hugo that was learnt in Darwin a few years before came to mind. "Great blunders are often made, like large ropes, of a multitude of fibres". The majority of blunders made with the ALC-50 were of a design nature and in time could probably be modified but the "Quality Control" of construction was something else - there wasn't any!

Over the next few weeks before the launching a report was compiled and sent to DTn's office in Canberra. It listed the "Good" and the "Bad" aspects of the ALC-50 from my point of view.

## "GOOD ASPECTS"

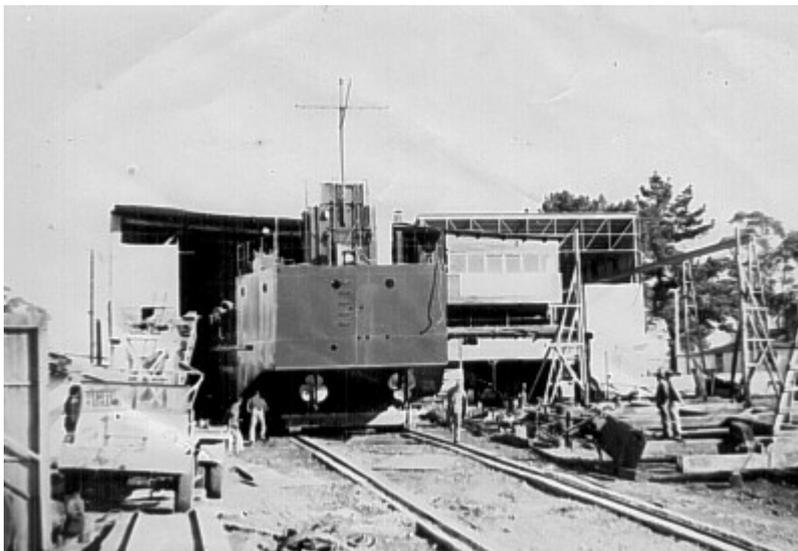
- It had four GM diesels, two on each shaft connected by an Allison Tourquematic gearbox
- There were prop tunnels running fore/aft which indicated that ALC-50 would be easily manoeuvrable.
- There are no more "Good Aspects"



## "BAD ASPECTS"

- Each Propeller was nine inches from a shaft housing which was triangular in shape, base uppermost and the top completely blocked out water flow to a prop blade as it passed. This would cause an imbalance which in turn would cause vibration and/or cavitation.
- The Bridge superstructure was built in Launceston and had been completed some weeks before, bought to Devonport and left in the open with no protection. It began rusting and when fitted to the ALC-50 was given one coat of Red Oxide over the surface rust, completed and given a coat of Bronze Green.
- The Bridge controls set up had a clutch for each engine with a master clutch which also had to be engaged. There were also four throttles. It was reminiscent of the ALC-40.
- The stern winch was hydraulic with 300 feet of 3/4 wire and the rate of pull was nine feet/min. and I doubted that it had any value.
- Since the ALC-50 was designed to carry a Centurion tank the cargo deck was fitted with "deck protectors" which were lengths of 6x2 hardwood battens held in place by welded steel lugs which, after laying the timber battens, were turned onto the timber using sledge hammers. This not only meant a laborious task in replacing timbers but the timber was placed onto the deck with no deck metal protection at all and the deck underneath the battens was heavily rusted.
- The bow door was only partially sealed which meant that the lower portion of the ramp outboard would fill with sea water and not only add the overall weight of the ramp but become heavily rusted and could not be accessed for repair & maintenance. Grease nipples on the ramp hinge were easy to get at if the ALC-50 was beached with the ramp in the up position

- Provision of power outlets on the bridge was non-existent.
- Leaks were found in the overhead plumbing lines which were covered by Insuwool, with Laminex sheeting over the insulation.
- There were no in built damage control features at all.
- The hold-downs provided for lashing down Centurion tanks were what one would expect when lashing down a Mini-Minor.
- There were too many inconsistencies between the drawing locations and the actual locations.
- Instead of using marine fittings ie. switches, valves, hatch fittings etc. domestic fittings were substituted and
- Void/Ballast and fuel tanks were not treated for anti-corrosion



The first ALC-50 (AB2996) was duly launched and it looked worse in the water than it did on the slipway. It did not look right and, on closer inspection, it was approximately six inches down by the stern and it had no fuel, water, Awnings, fittings, engine spares etc. I pointed this out to the Manager who simply said that it would all correct itself after fitting out had been completed. It never did.

We went on trials three days later and we may as well have not left the wharf. 100 yards upstream from the fitting out wharf was a low traffic bridge. The tide was coming in at about 1.5 Knots. Before we left I engaged all engines ahead and astern to about 1000 rpm to satisfy myself that they were OK. They performed exactly as one would expect of new GM's. On leaving the wharf both units were put slow astern and as the wharf was cleared the Port unit was put ahead at 800 rpm to swing the bow downstream. Nothing happened: I checked the clutches very quickly then disengaged and re-engaged with no response. I then put the Stb. unit ahead and there was no response. The immediate thought in my head was "another brilliant chapter in my career -- wrapped around a traffic bridge". By this time we were about 30 metres from the bridge and a voice yelled out from below "Try now!!" which I did and it worked. At this stage there was some heated discussion going on down below about "mucking around with Bowden cables". As the water temperature increased so power was increased to 1400. The vibration was the only indicator to me that the engines were running. Vibration was the only thing that could be heard on the bridge. We cleared the Mersey River and headed West along the coast. I increased power to 1700 rpm. but decreased shortly after, as I felt that the resonance being set up by the vibration would crumble the wheelhouse to small pieces. We then anchored in eight fathoms to try out the Stern Anchor.

When the anchor was let go it would not run free and had to be pulled out. It would have been disaster to go onto a surf beach. We then sent it out under hydraulic power and it was worse. If we went into a beach and let the anchor go under power 300 feet from the beach then, when we actually beached, the anchor would still be hanging from the Fairlead just above the water.

The Co. reps. then said there would have to be changes made so we went back into the river and before going to the fitting out wharf I decided to beach "it" to see how the bow ramp performed. The ramp worked but I doubt that this ALC would ever put a Centurion tank over an assault beach. It took four minutes to lower the ramp and another four to raise it. The hydraulics seemed to be labouring so we put the dinghy at the head of the ramp. It would not raise. It was a case of back to the drawing board again.

The next day the clutch system was removed and the hydraulics people were called in to see what could be done. About a week later we tried again. The engine control system was now a combination throttle/clutch with new Bowden cables -- one port and one stb. On further trials everything worked well but the hydraulics were forever slow -- it now took two minutes to raise the ramp and they never did fix the stern winch. The Fwd. anchor was hand operated with a very large handle. I think it was a winch which was taken from HMAS "Sydney" before it was scuttled in 1926.

We went out again on a full day's trial and this time we had a TV crew aboard. Also aboard was Lt. Col. B.D. Roche the Director of Transportation (RAE). On this occasion everything went OK apart from the vibration. We were on TV that night and Lt. Col. Roche told how the ALC-50's would greatly enhance the Army's capability to put Centurion tanks on a beach in a hostile environment as well as give the Army a full Logistic Re supply ability to small Army units in a hostile environment. It was superb for public consumption but to me it was simply "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic". One of the clips shown was one of Lt. Col. Roche and myself talking on the stern. The news reader was saying "The DTN is discussing with the skipper of the new Landing Craft, the potential of this Australian designed Landing Craft in supporting the Army in waters to the North of Australia". What the DTN was saying to me was "Laddie, your wife is having a baby in Adelaide and there is absolutely nothing you can do here as we will be accepting this "thing" in a few weeks, so hop off to Adelaide for a week". So I did.

Our relations with the local CMF Adjutant were not what could be called normal. It was an RAASC Truck Unit and the Adjutant, a Full Time Duty CMF Officer was not very helpful from the moment we had arrived at the Drill Hall to let them know we were in the area. He did not like us staying at the Formby Hotel and he certainly did not like me coming up to the Drill Hall and using his phone to ring the OC of 4 Water Tpt. Tp. in Sydney. The OC, Capt. John Hughes, had come down for a week to have a look at the ALC's and wished he hadn't bothered. He had met the officer concerned and told me that it would be best if we "kept contact as distant as possible".

This was not possible as we needed Administrative assistance at times and above all we needed that big Drill Hall as that was where the COL of both ALC's was going to be stored. The local Radio Station at that time had a program called "Wagon Wheels" was devoted to Army events and Army news within Tasmania. It was a good program and something that the large cities did not have. I was rather surprised when the local announcer approached me at the Shipyard and wanted to know if I would go on the show and give a talk about Water Transport as it was unheard of "down here". A little alarm bell rang in my head and I asked the Announcer if it had been cleared with anybody to which he replied "no, it had not". I suggested that if it was cleared with Tasmania Command HQ in Hobart then I certainly would give a short talk on Water Transport. I then rang Canberra and advised them of the request and asked "how much should be discussed about the ALC-50's?" The reply was "as little as possible and don't advance any of your own personal opinions. Tell them what they want to hear".

It was cleared by Hobart and the "talk" was subsequently recorded two days before the show went to air. The talk centred mainly around Water Transport both during WW2 and up to the present concerning size, vessels and location of Units plus the recent purchase of four LSM type Landing Ships from the U.S. Navy. When questions were asked about the "modern" Landing Craft being built in Devonport for the Army I replied in the same manner as Lt. Col. Roche had replied on Television earlier except that if I was on Television everybody would see me gritting my teeth as I replied. The Announcer was very skilful in asking questions about the ALC's as they were all related to Devonport and the local work force. I do not like public speaking, and this sort of thing was not my scene but all things considered it went well but it did not go down well with the CMF Adjutant who was furious when he listened to the Program. His objections were that it was his program and I had not cleared it with him. I very respectfully replied that it was cleared with both Hobart and Canberra and it would be best if the matter be taken up with his superiors. He slowed down a bit but I felt that I should be very careful in my future dealings with him which would be very shortly when the stores for the ALC-50's arrived.

Before my departure for Adelaide the Craft Outfit List (COL) or Craft Equipment Schedule (CES) arrived at the Drill Hall and naturally enough the Adjutant went through the roof when he saw the quantity and it was for two craft. The Drill Hall was the only secure place it could be stored. I knew that and so did he. He could not resist saying "The sooner you Water Transport people and your little boats get out of Devonport the happier I will be". I was thinking much the same. The COL was right out of WW2 and had been sitting in a warehouse for 15 years. The 8' bondwood dinghy was worse than the one we had sent down for the trials. The engine spares were for the GM\Gray Marine 64HN9. They got the GM right. The most modern piece of equipment was an electronic loud hailer. If all the crew were supplied with one we still would not be able to hear or talk because of the vibration. The COL took up quite a portion of the Drill Hall and more importantly it encroached upon the boundaries of the Badminton court which was painted on the Drill Hall floor. Knowing that this would create another problem with the Adjutant we moved portion of the COL to the sides so the boundary would be clear. My reason for doing this could be considered mercenary as we had played the odd game of Badminton already and we were going to ask the Adjutant for the Drill Hall key so we could play during the weekend.

I flew over to Adelaide for seven days to be with Suzanne and our eldest daughter, Karen, was born during my stay. Even at this stage I was beginning to think of the future and what it would bring. I seemed to be home for a week or two and then off somewhere or other.

Returning to Devonport I found that many alterations had been made to the first ALC-50 (AB2996) and after trials, if everything was OK, the second ALC (AB3000) would be altered. The trials were conducted OK and the vibration had been decreased to a level where it was now possible to speak in the Wheel house although the doors had been removed for alteration. We were advised that a "handover ceremony" would be held shortly and that meant "brass" from Canberra and god knows where else.

The fact that the ALC's were not ready did not seem to worry anyone so we waited for the big day. During the day I, at the Shipyard, I spent some time in the Drawing Office with the Naval Architect learning as much as I could about Ship Stability. One day I completed a stability diagram for the ALC with a Centurion Tank on board and then confidently told the Architect that loaded with a Centurion Tank then the ALC would have a negative GM which meant that it could capsize during a heavy roll. He smiled and said "No way" but later he had a look at my figures and then smiled and pointed out my error - somewhere along the line I had doubled the centre of gravity of the tank above the keel. Not to be outdone I then said

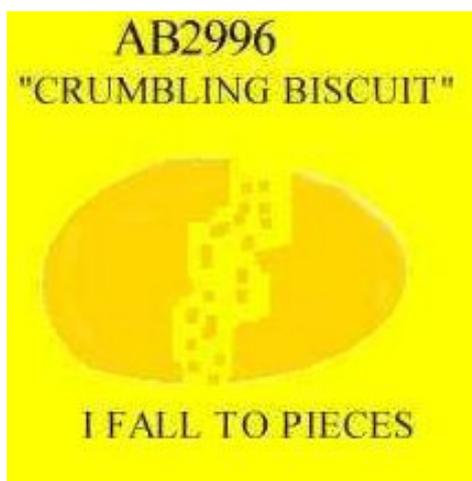
that if a member of the crew made a mistake with the void tank valves with full ballast then the ALC would sink. He did have a look and I was correct but he said that the chance of it happening was very remote and nobody would be so stupid to fill all void and ballast tanks. That remark made me smile.

The "handover ceremony" was a complete success with VIP's arriving from afar. The VIP's had cocktails and wine/cheese and were then joined by the yard workers for the ceremony and the party afterwards which was bolstered by two kegs of beer. The hand over was a scene from fantasy land. After the speeches the "keys" of AB2996 were handed to me by the Manager of the Yard and a photograph was taken with the Wheelhouse door as a backdrop. The Wheelhouse door was in fact a sheet of three ply painted bronze green and held in position by wedges. After the ceremony I returned the "keys" as they were probably someone's car keys. The ALC's were back in the Shipyards hands once again.

The bad news was that the ALC's would not be ready for delivery to us until February 1962. We would return to Sydney the week before Xmas; go on leave and return to Devonport at the end of January. This news did not go over that well with our friend the Adjutant as it meant the COL of the ALC's would be left in the Drill Hall for possibly another two months .

We returned to Sydney and I went to Brisbane. Jim Taylor had now retired from the Army and returned to Brisbane and Suzanne and Karen went with them. After leave we returned to Devonport and this time there were two crews. The ALC's were completed (as much as they ever would be with the present design) and we were to be escorted back to Sydney by AV1355 "Vernon Sturdee". We departed Devonport and refuelled at Deal Island before going up the NSW coast and the Adjutant and the Drill Hall settled back into their idyllic routine and probably lived happily ever after.

At Sydney we berthed at Chowder Bay and the remarks about our new Landing Craft were few as many could not find the words that were worthy of such craft. None the less they were all we were going to get. Les Dennis was aboard with me and we had a name board made up as follows.-



Both ALC-50's began a series of independent trials in Sydney and Nelsons Bay on exercises and one thing was common to both craft - The ALC could not get off the beach if a Centurion tank was placed on board. The Australian Shipbuilding Commission had done it again. The fellow who designed it would most likely be promoted to head a Govt. Department in the not too distant future. "CRUMBLING BISCUIT" (AB2996) was tasked to take part in "Operation Blowdown" which was to be held on Cape York Peninsula. Australia could not afford the cost of an Atomic explosion on Cape York to determine the effect of a nuclear explosion on a rainforest so it was decided to simulate by building a tower in the rain forest and put some 50+ tons on top and detonate it. The crew for this trip would be myself, Les Dennis and two Engineers.

We departed Sydney and were towed to Brisbane by AV1356 "CLIVE STEELE", the trip being the quietest that I would ever have and apart from the plumbing lines giving way behind the Formica panelling it was uneventful. Arriving in Brisbane we berthed alongside the

"STEELE" at Bulimba and both vessels began loading immediately. We were behind schedule and to make up the time it was decided that the "STEELE" would tow us to Lloyd Bay and she would unload her cargo a little further on and then proceed to her main task. Included on the cargo manifest for AB2996 was about 10 tons of bagged Cement which I thought would be interesting and drums of fuel. My role in this Operation was Logistical Re supply between Cairns and Lockhart River (Iron Range). A quick visit to Suzanne and to see Karen and we were on our way.

The Lt. Col. in command of the construction phase of "Operation Blowdown" was ever present at the loading and when we were introduced he seemed quite pleasant and remarked that the area was eagerly, awaiting our arrival. Little did I know that from this point on events were going to be a continuing nightmare that did not end until January 1965.

We departed Brisbane and the tow was connected some 3 miles past Bishop Island at the Brisbane River mouth. For the duration of the trip until our return to Sydney we would run 12 hour watches between Les Dennis and myself. We had taken on two Spr's from 24 Construction Squadron to be used as Deck crew. I had told the Cpl Engr that the main engines were to be kept in a "Go" status at all times and starting would be done from the wheel house. We commenced the run up to Caloundra under tow at 12 knots and as we settled down the speed would be increased to 14 knots. What nobody foresaw was that we were incapable of making that speed under our own power and now we were in a fully loaded condition. (The designers had it all wrong - the maximum we could carry was 28 tons) The speed and the loaded condition changed the action of the sea upon the hull and a secondary bow wave formed aft of amidships. The resultant wave formed and was higher than the cargo deck, aft, which was our lowest freeboard. The wave naturally spilled over the cargo deck and the engine room hatches. There was no problem with this and we continued on. About 30 minutes later the Engr came to the Wheelhouse and reported that sea water was coming out of the outboard engine blowers. A quick check to verify the report and then up to the cargo deck and then all became clear. The secondary wave had formed above the exhausts and since this height was constant the water had naturally siphoned down to the engines finally coming out through the engine air intake blowers. Had I started the engines from the Wheel house the cylinder heads would have blown apart. I quickly advised the "CLIVE STEELE" of the predicament and we hastily returned to Brisbane. It was obvious that we were not going anywhere for a week or so. We berthed at Bulimba again and very quickly transferred our cargo to the "CLIVE STEELE" which then departed for Cape York. The bagged cement had made a mess of our cargo deck during the transfer but that was simple to the predicament we were in regarding the engines. Since the water had gone right through the engines it was decided to remove the two complete units and have the work done ashore.

It took two weeks and a new cargo was assigned to us. Time was then spent on trials and AB2996 was then included in a military display at the Botanical Gardens which was a complete waste of time. We had the Standard Compass "swung" in Brisbane and the Adjuster had remarked that "It is the best I can do and good luck". We were also given frequencies to enable us to work the Army network in Brisbane and I do remark at the time that the frequencies given were too low i.e. 2.556 MHz for the Australphone radio to be effective during daylight hours but there was no change. We finally departed Brisbane and we did have contact on the radio but I also worked VIB, the Civil Small Ships radio, as when on the "TARRA" it was the only station we ever used mainly because the frequency of 6.28 MHz was higher. Once AB2996 cleared the Brisbane River we had no contact with the Army so I crossed the bar at Caloundra and telephoned them that we could hear but we did not have enough power to get through. The result was that a Signal Corps Operator with the latest transmitter, A British C-11 system was despatched and we left Caloundra the following day.

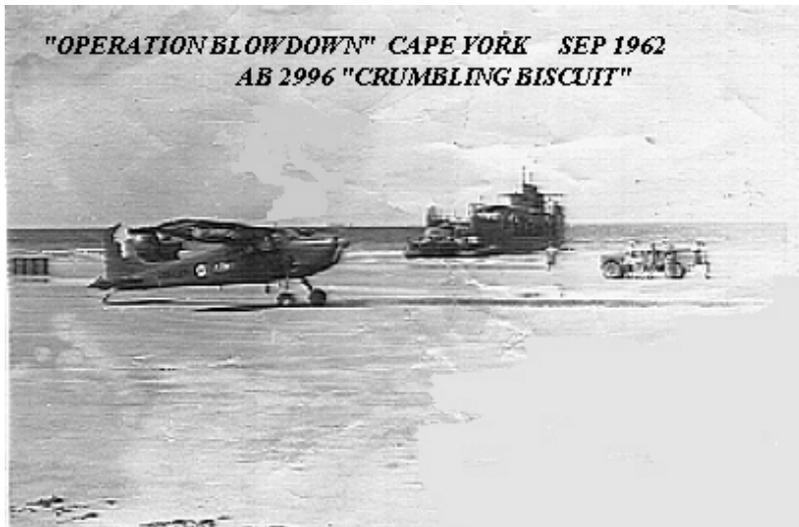
The weather worsened somewhat and I was waiting for the next episode to occur. AB2996 was a very wet craft and unpredictable in its behaviour in moderate weather. We did not have Radar installed and the taking of accurate bearings with the standard compass was not possible due to constant vibration of the Compass pedestal.

We crossed the bar at Tin Can Bay and proceeded up the strait between Fraser Island and the mainland, then across to Bundaberg. I was beginning to have some doubt as to the usefulness of the Engr's aboard and would have to make a decision on their future before our arrival in the Cape York area. Their obsession for the bottle was beginning to get a little out of hand.

Departing Bundaberg we anchored at Keppel Island, Percy Isles and near Hayman Island before reaching Townsville. The Army at Townsville, in 1962, had only a small Regular Army staff which was a Cadre to the CMF units based at Kissing Point. We had advised them of our ETA and had requested a berth at the main wharf. When we arrived the Wharf Manager must have thought we were a troopship and had allocated space accordingly and was disappointed to find we were only 80 feet in length. We were met by some of the Army and their families and we had them aboard to have a cup of coffee when a staff car came to a halt on the wharf. Thinking that it was probably the Area Commander I went up onto the Wheel house deck to find that the Chief of the General Staff Lt. Gen. Wilton was coming aboard with his Aide and the Area Commander. Our visitors down below were somewhat embarrassed by this event, I was horrified, but there was nowhere to hide anybody. The CGS was not at all fussed by either our visitors or the fact that everything he touched was covered in a mixture of dried salt and dieso exhaust. He had heard of our ETA and wanted to have a look at AB2996 as he did not know how long we were staying in Townsville. I took him on a tour of AB2996 and he asked questions as to how it performed and its value as a new addition and I told him its value was negligible as it could not carry out its primary role which was to carry a Centurion Tank and showed him the more unsavoury aspects of the ALC-50 as built and the deterioration of components since leaving Sydney. He was very attentive and asked quite a lot of questions about the ALC and I very quickly got the message that regards Landing Craft, the General was no newcomer. He spoke to all the crew and then was gone. The two Engr's had gone ashore to get "a part" which meant they were at the closest Pub and would return sooner or later in the usual condition. The moment of truth was fast approaching.

We departed Townsville the following morning and went direct to Cairns in very good weather arriving the next morning. A word was had with the Cpl Engr who retaliated with the fact that the heat in the Engine room was unbearable and did not like my ruling about "no booze on board" to which I replied that the "booze rule" stands and we would see what could be done about the heat problem. This was the first I had heard of the "unbearable heat" and it was not reflected in the Engine Room Log Book but the heat in the Engine Room was unbearable. I rang Brisbane and requested assistance in the problem and was advised that the matter would be attended to. Over the next two days the drunkenness had got out of hand completely and they either were not capable of carrying out their duties or simply were not on board. I then rang Brisbane and requested to the DAQMG (Mov), Maj. Frank Guest, that they be removed and two replacements be sent to Cairns ASAP. The DAQMG(Mov) acted quickly and when the two Engr's arrived back on board drunk I let them sleep it off and then told them to pack as they were being relieved and a vehicle from the local CMF depot would arrive shortly to take them to that Depot and then on the train to Brisbane. They were not amused and the usual counter accusations began but I walked away. As far as I was concerned the incident was closed.

A couple of days later Cpl Alan Parry and Spr Graham Price arrived and over the next two days the mechanical aspects of AB2996 took on a new and much rejuvenated dimension. We departed Cairns and went direct to Lloyd Bay. There was only one "hairy" course change and that was at Boulder Reef, off Cooktown, and consisted of a "dog leg" with three reefs which had a light at the Northern end and the reef extremities marked by Radar beacons. As we did



not have Radar, speed was reduced to enable dawn transit. We entered Lloyd Bay and beached at what is now known as Quintal Beach. The shore party of 24 Construction Squadron were on hand to unload and also was the Lt. Col. in command of the construction phase. He wanted me to do a trip to the Mission at Lockhart, down the coast a few miles, the next morning and put on the Army Cessna for me to have a look at the area. I could not think why an aerial recce of a

beach on this coast was necessary as you could either get in or not and there was nothing on the chart to suggest that there would be a problem. I went for the flight anyway and it was a clear beach but the fringing reef uncovers at low water and would mean in and out at high water.

The SE wind increased in the afternoon so we filled all ballast tanks and loaded about 40 fuel drums and a TD18 Bulldozer. We then settled down for a quiet evening on board but this was shattered at about 2200 by the arrival of the Lt. Col. and party. He was quite drunk and acting very childish but when he got on board AB2996 he let go with a torrent of abuse towards me as to why the fuel drums were loaded aft and the Dozer forward. Thinking that it was a reasonable question I stated that it was done because the drums were cargo for Cairns and to unload drums across a beach to unload a Bulldozer and then load the drums back on board again was a waste of time and energy. Also the placing of a heavy bulldozer which would have its blade resting right across the engine room and leaving very little access to the hatchways was not only considered to be foolish safety wise but would also affect the fore and aft stability. He then said "I want the positions reversed - now!" to which I replied "No" and then it was on. At this time the crew had heard the abuse and retired to the sleeping quarters which were adjacent to the ALC mess. I was pushed into the mess by this "outstanding" Lt. Col. and soundly abused. At one stage he said "I have been waiting for you for weeks and now you are here you will do exactly as I say. If I want the arse torn out of this vessel, you will do it! "While he was making this manly statement his fingers were being jabbed into my stomach and pushing me backwards. I was quite unprepared for this onslaught from a drunk but some resistance had to be given and I was ever mindful that I was a Sgt and he was a Lt. Col. so my only recourse was to state that there was a Military Board Instruction (MBI 171-1 (I think?)) relating to the Control and Operation of Water Transport and within that Instruction was a section on command of Water Transport vessels and that as I was in command then I and I alone was responsible for the Navigation and safety of AB2996. To be fair the MBI was probably written to cover the LSM's only and the "little ships" didn't count, however I knew what I was doing - he didn't. This only enraged him and the finger jabbing

continued as well as this very eloquent statement "You are under my command and therefore I command this vessel!"

By now I had taken about all I could of this fool, the ALC- 50 and the Army in general so I pushed his arm away and told him, in as polite a manner as possible "If you want to take over command of this F - craft. SIR....then please make a F----- statement in the Log Book to that effect and sign your name in a legible manner. He tore the Lag Book from my hands and wrote a short statement and put a signature the size of the page across it. I then yelled "Cpl Dennis" and the cabin door immediately opened and Les said "Sgt" and I told him to wake the crew and get them ashore as a drunken Lt. Col. was now in command. (Les must have had his ear very close to that door to open it so quickly)

There was another officer present, a full Colonel, and he sensed that things were getting right out of hand and he came between me and the Lt. Col. and very quietly said "Everybody calm down... now!" and hustled the Lt. Col. outside onto the cargo deck for a few minutes. Les Dennis then asked if I would like a cup of tea and that very short question stopped the Adrenaline pumping and I calmed down. I was then called out to the cargo deck and as I went Les said "take it easy" and I did but if I was subjected to any more of what had just taken place I was going to hit this fool, come what may.

I was asked to explain the reason why I had refused to alter the position of the load and I explained as best as I could about the "non loaded" fore and aft stability of AB2996 which was 12" down by the stern and since the drums were destined for Cairns it was only logical that they be loaded first and on leaving the beach ballast tanks would be filled, if necessary, to

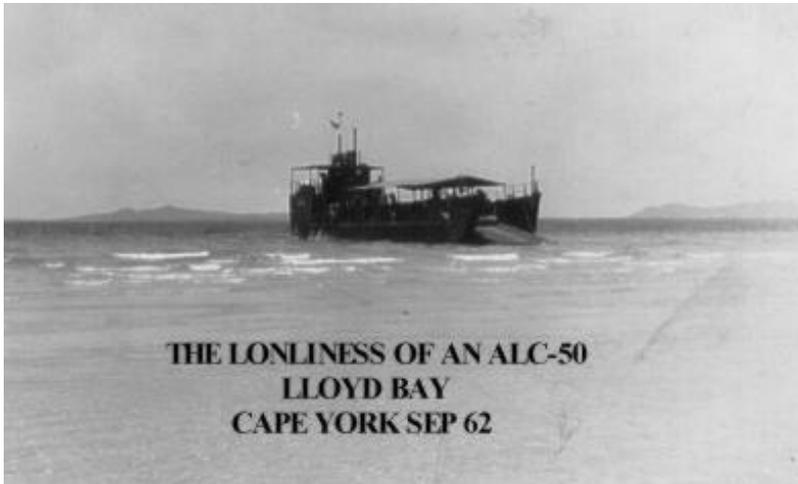
a level consistent with a normal trim. I was then dismissed and told "get a good night's sleep".



We departed the beach at 0600 and delivered the TD-18 to the Mission and then obtained a bucket of Crayfish tails, which were plentiful as the inner reef here was a stopping place for the Crayfish on their migratory travels, from the reef face. The Crayfish were sheltering in cavities on the reef face and were easily found as their feelers could be seen easily. We were diving down

to about six feet with rubber bands made from tyre tubes and a welding rod with a barb fashioned at one end. We simply fired the rod as you would use a bow and arrow. We got about 10 lb. of tails in this manner. We then departed for Lloyd bay. On arrival at Quintal beach a Landrover was waiting for us and the driver handed over a parcel containing six bottles of beer from the Officers Mess. Les Dennis came up with the idea of returning them so we returned the beer to the Officers Mess. As the wind strength was increasing from the SE I decided to move up the beach about a mile and beach in the lee of Lloyd Island. The beach there was hard yellow sand and the water very clear and it was a perfect spot to wait until needed to go to Cairns.

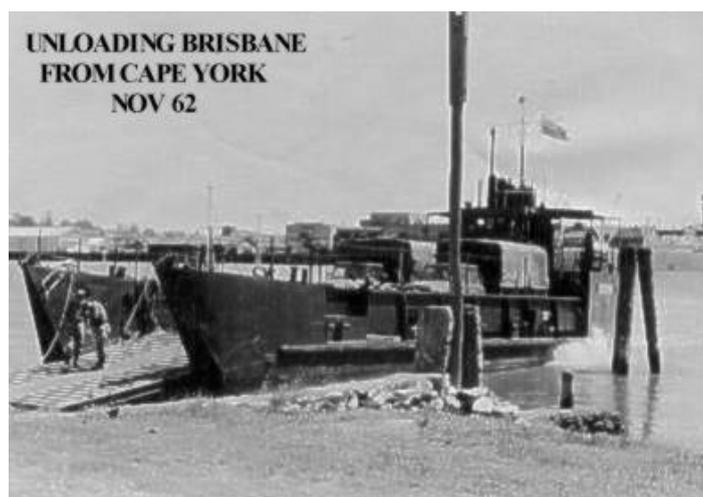
The next morning a Lt. from the shore camp arrived and told me of an incident that occurred the night before. The Lt. had been "grabbed" as a driver for the Lt. Col about 2300 and wanted to be taken down to the beach where AB2996 was beached. Arriving at the beach and noticing that we had moved he then demanded that he be taken up the beach to where we were beached and that "Bayliss was going to learn a thing or two". On the way up to the beach they came to a small but very deep creek which could not be crossed. The Lt. Col. then



got out of the Land rover and hurled abuse at me for about 15 minutes even though AB2996. was still about 1/2 mile away. The Lt. was also abused for no reason at all except that he happened to be there. The Lt. Col. left for Brisbane the next morning and the Lt. warned me to be careful as the Lt. Col. "was out to get me". I soon forgot the whole incident.

We continued on our tasking between Lloyd Bay and Cairns carrying personnel, empty drums and vehicles to Cairns and drum fuel and rations on the return trip. The tower had been completed and personnel from 24 Construction Squadron were being flown back to Brisbane by C-130 aircraft. We were to take back to Brisbane a load of vehicles belonging to the rear party. We carried out measured fuel runs during the waiting period to get a more accurate graph of fuel consumption and speed at varying RPM. The day before our departure from Lloyd Bay I was surprised to see one of our own officers appear on the scene. He was to travel with us as far as Townsville where another officer would join us for the trip to Brisbane. I only knew of these officers as they were of Water Transport origin but were not seagoing. We departed Lloyd bay and stopped overnight at Princess Charlotte Bay and Cape Flattery before arriving in Cairns to take on fuel We did not see much of our passenger at all.

In Townsville he left and the other one arrived. I did ask as to why they were aboard and was told it was a "fact finding" mission to determine the suitability of the ALC-50 which I thought was odd since neither of them would have been on a Landing Craft of this class let alone ever command a Landing Craft on a harbour run. They would have had a short service on an LSM where the crew was 48 and one man one job but even then their knowledge would be limited. The trip from Townsville was rough at times and



our "fact finder" spent most of the time lying down. We arrived Brisbane and discharged our cargo at Bulimba and the officer departed. On the weekend both officers came down to AB2996 and a "sort" of conference was held and a report was compiled by the two officers. Present were the two officers, Les Dennis, Alan Parry and myself. Questions were asked and

we supplied answers and they left the ship. As far as I was concerned it was a legitimate meeting and forgot it. One thing that was not mentioned was my "affair" at Lloyd Bay and they had not referred to the Log Book apart from the time they were on board.

About a week later the "TARRA" arrived with Doug Iffla as Master and we would return to Sydney in company with her. Also on board was a new Second Lt., John McDowell, who had joined in Sydney. A couple of days later I was informed from Victoria Barracks that I was to be paraded before the GOC Northern Command, Maj. Gen. Brogan at Bulimba as an adverse report on me had been submitted. At last the "penny dropped" and I realised what our two gallant officers were doing on board and for whom. I then asked the Second Lt. to be present at this parade as it was obvious that somebody other than a local officer should be present.

I was paraded before Gen. Brogan and he told me of the report and did I have anything to say. The report was never shown or read to me and I thought "What have I got to lose" and said "I believe this whole matter has arisen out of an altercation I had with a drunken senior officer in Lloyd Bay". Gen. Brogan stared at me for what seemed minutes but was only a second or so and said "Who was the officer?" I gave the name and the Second Lt. came to the table and gave Gen. Brogan the Logbook, opened to the relevant pages. Gen. Brogan read the Log Book and asked many questions and then said "That will be all" and I was dismissed but not before he gave me a lengthy diatribe on my dress as there was a large hole in the front of my shirt and my navel was clearly visible to all. I never heard any more up to the time of our sailing for Sydney.

After a short leave, during which a Home unit had been allotted to me in Ben Boyd Road, Neutral Bay and Suzanne and Karen joined me from Brisbane, things went back to normal such as using AB2996 for normal duties on Sydney Harbour. In January 1963 Major "Haggis" Wilson, then OC 32 Small Ship Squadron came over to Chowder Bay and told me that an adverse report concerning me had been received in Canberra from the CRE's office in Brisbane and he wanted to ask me a few questions. Once again I was never shown the report and from the questions he asked it was obvious that they were the content of the adverse report. He had dismissed most of the criticism as "childish" and I then told him how much of the information contained in the report was given by the crew and not as an effort by the Investigating Officer/s. He said that the whole thing "smelled" but there were two items that could not be overlooked and they were:-

1. "A Chronometer Error Log Book was not kept by Sgt. Bayliss". The "Chronometer" on board AB2996 was then shown to Maj. Wilson and he laughed. The "Chronometer" was the decorative clock as supplied by the Shipyard. I then told Maj. Wilson that the clock did sound the "bells" on the half hour but the half hour was never on time. In short there was no Chronometer carried aboard AB2996 or AB3000 and, to my knowledge, none were issued to vessels below the 300 ton Class unless for purposes of a Navigation Course being aboard. I was then asked as to how I calculated the deviation of the compass while underway. My reply was that Azimuths were taken at least every two hours and always when coming onto a new course which had a distance of 25 miles or greater. Compass bearings of the Sun and Stars were difficult to obtain because of vibration and the constant movement of the Compass card. Compass bearings of the Sun/Stars were obtained with accuracy only when speed was reduced and the sea was calm. In that case the correct time would be taken from WWV or WWVH and noted, then the bearing would be obtained and the number of seconds that had elapsed since the noted time would be added thus obtaining GMT. The majority of Compass checks were made by using transit bearings which were much faster to obtain and more accurate.

2. "When running from Caloundra to Brisbane AB2996 did not follow the recommended track as given on the chart and the course followed passed over shoal areas thus compromising the safety of the vessel and crew"

I then produced the chart on the approaches to Brisbane and traced the course I had taken from Caloundra. The depths on charts in 1962 were given in fathoms and feet under 10 fathoms and below the four fathoms line were shaded in pale blue. I Could not see any reason to meander across Moreton Bay in a craft drawing five feet six inches following a track which had depths ranging from 24 feet to 34 feet. My course, at times, crossed into the four fathom line and below but never less than three fathoms.

Maj. Wilson smiled and said "They do not know what they are talking about and you have nothing to worry about. But bear in mind that this fellow is out to get you but as you will never be posted to Queensland he will never get the chance". I was also asked if I knew of an assault by the "revered" gentleman on a Second Lt. who was asleep in his bunk on the "TARRA" at Bulimba. I replied that I had heard about it but knew little of it. In fact I knew the Second Lt. concerned and had did my best to have him proffer charges but he was swayed by someone above and nothing more was done. I now breathed a sigh of relief as the whole matter was closed but to this day my contempt for the two "passengers" from Lloyd Bay to Brisbane is greater than my contempt for the Lt. Col. who was to be pitied more than anything else. What I thought was closed and finished had two more years to go but I did not know about it at this time and I would be posted "De Facto" to Queensland. ( In 1962 Area Command, New Guinea was a subsidiary of Northern Command and all members of RAE were controlled by the CRE Northern Command and I was posted to New Guinea as Master AM2834 "FERN".)

