

Chuck Mackey

on

Kodiak During the 1964 Earthquake and Tidal Wave

By

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My name is Chuck Mackey and I have a friend here who wants to talk about the tidal wave and earthquake of 1964. It happened at 5:27 in the evening and at that time it was kind of hazy. It wasn't dark so you could see pretty well what was going on. I lived on a boat in the boat harbor; it was about a sixty five foot boat. I had some stuff stored on another boat, about an eighty foot boat. Neither boat made out too well; they broke their backs. One went up the end of what is now the ferry dock, I think they now call it Marine way and Main Street, and the other boat went up and landed at about the "Y". There used to be a hill there with a school on it and that's where the boat that I actually lived on went. It rolled in the tidal wave so 90% of my stuff was gone, I lost it.

There were five waves total as near as I could figure out. The First two filled the town up and the third was the biggest. People can believe me or not, but the boat harbor itself was dry, there was no major water in it. You could see the bottom of it. The channel was dry and that's when the third wave came in. It looked like a bunch of toys in a bathtub with somebody stirring up all the boats and the buildings.

The water pressure on the inside of the buildings as the water came up into town was just about equal to the water level on the outside of the buildings. When the third wave came in it sucked the water away from these buildings and away from the houses and when the pressure was taken off, unequal pressure was applied to the buildings and the buildings collapsed. That's what collapsed most of them. The theaters and houses and

canneries were all floating around part of them in the boat harbor. When that third wave finally went back out to sea it took all of the canneries from the channel, and there were four or five in the near island channel at the time, and wiped them all clean. The only thing you saw left was part of the pilings sticking up. I worked for Amel Norton at that time at Kadiak Canneries. I went down after the tidal wave to take a look and all I saw was about five pilings. That was a big cannery. It was three stories high and it was at least as big as the Bible Chapel is now, a hundred and fifty feet long and at least a hundred feet wide. It took building and all, machinery and everything in it out to sea.

The downtown area used to have a fish and game building in the parking lot area, and the water was about twelve feet high on it. I had a pickup sitting down there in the parking lot. I went by it prior to the third wave and I saw my pickup sitting there. It wound up pushed probably two hundred feet away with a building sitting on the back of it so I left the pickup there and let the trash people pick it up.

During the earthquake itself I thought that a boat went by and that's why the boat I was living on rocked. I had AFRN Armed Forces Radio Network on. Those guys told us there was a tidal wave coming and everybody should head for high ground. I grabbed that radio, I had one pair of cannery boots, no coat and I went over the side of that boat because I tried to start that boat and I couldn't get away from the dock. The best thing you can do, if you can is to go out to sea and get into deep water. The deeper

the water the better because the wave action is not as severe, but I couldn't get the boat to pull away from the dock, so I flipped the switch and shut her down jumped onto the dock and went running up the dock. They had power lines about eight to ten feet over the top of the dock with cross lines, that's how the dock got power. I was running over those. I went up to a skiff that is close to where the harbor master's is now. I saw little John Ekhardt, he's a fisherman around here. He wanted to know where I was going. I told him I knew of a skiff that ran. The town was slowly filling up with about the first or second wave, I didn't know which. I think it was the first wave. I came across a teenager and I told him to get in that skiff and I thought he was going right through the bottom of it. He didn't know where to go or what to do. We picked another guy off a piece of dock that was floating. A lot of people have asked in the past why we didn't run up the ramp and go up into town that way. The ramps are movable, they go up and down with the tide and when the earthquake hit the ramps and all access to the streets from the dock fell away.

From there we went in the skiff. About where Cy's is, to the right of it where the culverts come out, there used to be a bridge there, a small concrete bridge, so we had to stay out of the way of it. We went right up the middle of what would be the street in the skiff and we touched ground about where Jack Mann's car lot is. We used to call it the base-town road but city slickers came up here and now they call it west Rezonof. There were telephone lines hanging down, leaded lines, and I threw a

knot around that and I took off up the hill. After the tidal wave there were two buildings left, one was Krafts grocery store which is now approximately where the NW corner of Krafts is now, it was a concrete building. All of the wooden buildings were all stirred up and broken into pieces. The tidal wave went up approximately where the police station is now and over to the American Legion building. The concrete block American legion building was the only building left in that area. There was no other buildings attached to it or around it. There used to be a hill right there and the old territorial jail was on top of that hill, so that helped deflect some of the force of the water. After the tidal wave, when things settled down there were tides coming and going all night long. They gradually came less and less until they finally got back to the normal features of a tide.

I went up to Fred Ognen's house, who I knew pretty well. He had a boat called the Fern. He was down at the South end of the Island crab fishing. He was coming into town and he stopped at Kaguiak which is a village that doesn't exist anymore after the tidal wave, and he picked up a bunch of people there. He went into Old Harbor. All of the people there lost their homes. They did have an emergency tent set up with a radio in it, but they cound'n't get it to function. He came in and laid on the horn and they all came down and he loaded all of the people from Kaguiak and Old Harbor onto his hundred and twenty nine foot crab boat which used to be a bouy tender for the Coast Guard. From there he came on in past Sitkalitic looking for people on the

beach and past Port Hoborn, but the people were all right there. A skiff came out from Hoborn and met him (that's an old whaling station that closed in thirty seven. He came around Cape Chiniak and on into the Navy base because there was no place that he could put that many people up. I think there was sixty people from one village and sixty or seventy out of old harbor, I don't know for sure how many there were. They came on into marginal pier and nine minutes peninsula and they unloaded all of the villagers there and they put them up in the gym out there and in hangers where they could set up beds. Then the Fern came around old woman's bay and into town and laid on the horn. His house was behind what is now the Westmark, old timers call it the KI. When the Fern anchored up, she had a good size anchor and he dug the anchor in. It's a good thing he did that because about two or three days after the tidal wave we had winds here that took fifteen boats, broke them up and put them on the beach. It was a wind and a half like this eighty five, ninety mile an hour wind we just had here. There was a whole pile of boats that didn't have a harbor to go to, Dog bay was non existant, it was a little bay in there but it didn't hold too many boats. I remember the Fern laying to with five or six boats tied on his stern and it looked like a mother duck with a whole bunch of ducklings.

We'll back up a bit. I just remembered that running down the dock I went past two black and red Kadiak fishing boats, and Mary Anderson was on one of them with a young girl. I don't know who the kid was. I hollered at her real loud down into the boat, because I had to get out of there, but there was no answer.

The only cannery to survive the tidal wave out there on cannery row was King Crab. Mary Anderson and that boat was sunk out there off of the King Crab dock. Three days later somebody found the boat or snagged onto it or something. They sent divers down, one of them was Guy Powell. He found her body back in the lazarette. How she got from the cabin to the lazarette I'll never know. Anyway, they found the cape boat and it was sunk right there and her body was still in it. They never did find the little girl as far as I know. Then the Ferry came in and tied up at the King Crab dock. When they pulled up the anchor it pulled up a body.

My sister was a social service worker in Anchorage. They figure there was one hundred and fourteen dead in that area. I only know of five around here who died. Bobby Jones was not counted because they found his body a long time after the tidal wave and they couldn't verify who it was, but they think it was him. Bobby Jones was on the Sunrise. A skipper that I knew, I can't remember his name now owned a large steel boat, and when that tidal wave sucked those boats out of the harbor those two guys jumped aboard the Sunrise. The Norwegian fired it off and got it running. They hit that tidal wave head on. The Norwegian hollered at his deckhand, but everything was happening so fast he only had a chance to holler once. That boat sank, it rolled in the tidal wave, when it rolled it came up and Jones was not on the back deck and has never been seen since as far as I know. The Norwegian rolled around inside of that steel boat and then it popped up off the end of near island out by bouy seven, and it

sank. The mast was sticking up and the Norwegian was hanging on to the mast. A boat came by and picked him up; he was beat up, but he made it.

Mission beach had a trailer park about where the Salvation Army is now and that whole park got washed up into potato patch lake. At the time there were two feet of ice on it.

The breakwater now is probably ten feet higher than the original one. The chanel leading into dog bay used to be level where the green grass stops on the top. There was an orange and black, ninety foot power skawl called the Baluga belonging to Alaska Packers Association. These things are really wide. They used them to service the salmon traps that they had spread out around the island until they made traps illegal. That thing draws nine feet of water and from up on the side of the hill during the third wave I saw that Baluga go over that piece of peninsula and wind up in Dog Bay. The guy figured out where he was and he dropped the anchor right away. He didn't want to go out of there, it was a real protected bay at that time. He didn't want to float out of there and the power skawl was flat on the bottom and he was sitting on mud so he was all right. He let the anchor go with a bunch of chain so that when the tide did come in he'd stay there.

The school used to sit where the Bakery mall is and it sat on top of a hill. There was a power skawl by the name of Selif. It was owned by Bill Cuthrop. He wound up sitting below the old school and he had about four thousand king crab aboard. When everything settled down the first thing they did was plow a road

into that power skawl and they hired some you guys to throw those king crab over board into a dup truck. It was stinking so bad you absolutely could not stand it. The methane gas was terrible. Bill was all right, he wound up town and eventually they put that boat on rollers and rolled it down into the harbor. Bill had a power plant that didn't require water or cooling. So he ran his power plant and had his groceries and he stood by on the radio on an emergency channel.

Dotty was a radio operator at Alaska telephone and telegraph and she was keeping communications with the lower forty eight. About where the "Y" is there used to be a log cabin liquor store. The only phone at that time that worked was hanging on the outside of that liquor store. It was a payphone. There used to be lines of people that went there to make telephone calls so that's where a lot of us made our calls.

Before the tidal wave I'd buy cases of canned milk and coffee from the boats that were headed back to Seattle because I could get them for real cheap. The boats were going back and they were going to replenish there supple befor they came back north for the next fishing season, so I'd buy it off of them. I had about ten or twelve cases of canned milk, one and a half cases of canned butter and three cases of Folgers coffee in three pound cans. The grocery stores were wiped out exepct for City Market. That little market was about half the size that it is now and they just didn't have the food that it took to supply the people in the town. The Navy was flying food in from the lower forty eight. . . but they didn't have any milk, so the Ognen's

where I was staying told the kids to go around the neighborhood and find out who had babies and we gave away all of that canned milk. So it went to good use anyway, it didn't get spoiled or thrown away or anything. Every house around the neighborhood we gave a three pound can of coffee.

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

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