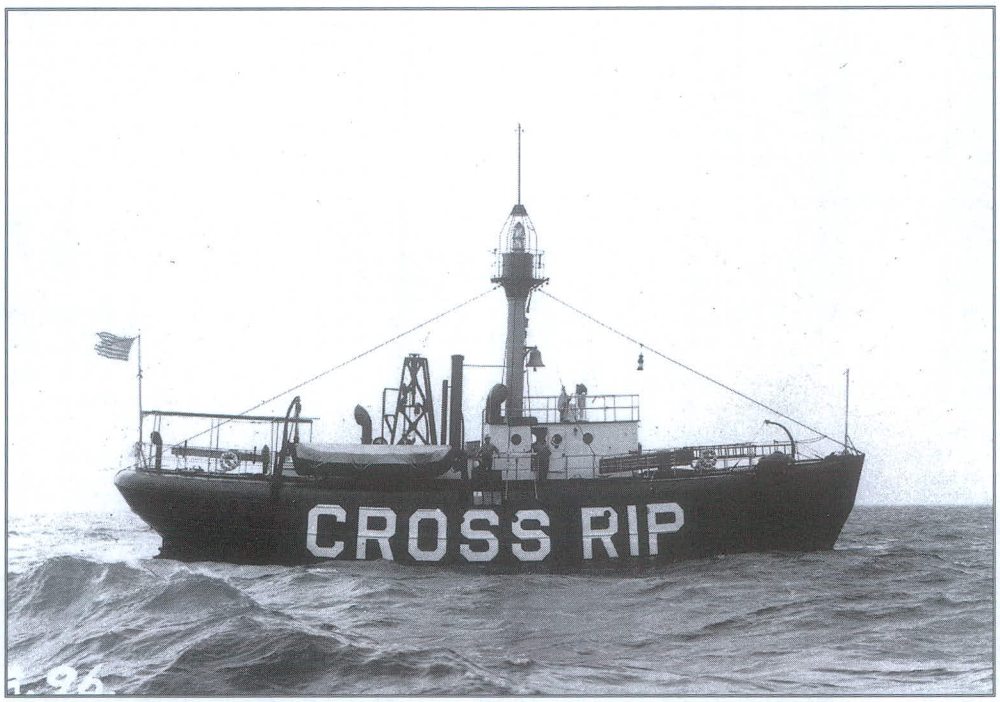
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Lightship Memories



Life Aboard Cross Rip Lightship #96, May — November 1950

By Pasquale "Pat" Varallo

I was born in Philadelphia, PA in November of 1930. At age 16 and 2 months, with the aid of an altered baptismal certificate, my mother reluctantly allowed me to enlist in the U.S. Army for one and half years. My mother was abandoned by my father, with six underage children. I was a bit of a juvenile delinquent.

My mother did the best she could and I believe she did the correct thing in allowing me to enlist. It was February 1947. After basic training at Ft. Dix, New Jersey, I was sent to Ft. Myer, VA and assigned to the Ceremonial Detachment, 7011th MPs, which later became the Third Infantry Regiment, also known as the "Old Guard." Along with other Honor Guard duties I was also on the firing party for General J.J. Pershing's funeral and served as a guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Although proud of my short Army career, I had always had a burning desire to go to sea. And one and a half years later I enlisted as SA in the U.S. Coast Guard, Jan. 20, 1950. I was barely 19 years old.

After boot camp, I went to Woods Hole, MA via Boston and after a couple of days at the Coast Guard Base Woods Hole, I boarded the tender *Laurel* for CROSS RIP SHOAL *LV 96/520*. I was finally going to sea!

It was in the afternoon that the tender departed Woods Hole. She had other work to do before servicing CROSS RIP, and the other LVs in Nantucket Sound. I think *Laurel* had to reset a buoy. This is a most interesting operation. I can't describe it but I was really impressed with the seamanship involved.

I spent the night aboard *Laurel* and awoke the next morning to a thrilling brightness never experienced ashore. The sun was up; it was relatively early; visibility was unlimited and we were underway. I felt great. By the time we reached CROSS RIP we had near zero visibility. I had never seen a fog so thick.

The transfer was made smoothly, the relieving seamen and I went aboard CROSS RIP and the shore party went to *Laurel*. Provisions, mail, orders, etc. were also transferred. I waved goodbye to my buddy, a fellow recruit who was going further out to serve aboard HANDKERCHIEF [another light vessel station]. And I stood there on deck in shock – foghorn blaring, a pea soup of a fog and amongst nine strangers.

It wasn't long before I met the Cap'n and crew and was relieved that they were all very friendly and helpful. I'll list the crew as I remember at the end of this recollection.

The ship was in terrible condition. It was rusty and small and infested with cockroaches. After everything was secure and intro[duction]s were made we sat around the mess table and talked. I was shown my room and bed. Two to a room and I was in the upper [bunk] which had less room than the lower, which also had a porthole.

The men made jokes about the cockroaches and I thought they must be exaggerating. No, they weren't exaggerating. One of the men took an insect sprayer and gave a few good shots into a crack in the bulkhead covering. There ensued an army of creepy crawlers marching all over

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the overheads and bulkheads of my room. I was sick. That night when everyone turned in I couldn't bring myself to do likewise. I was left alone at the table.

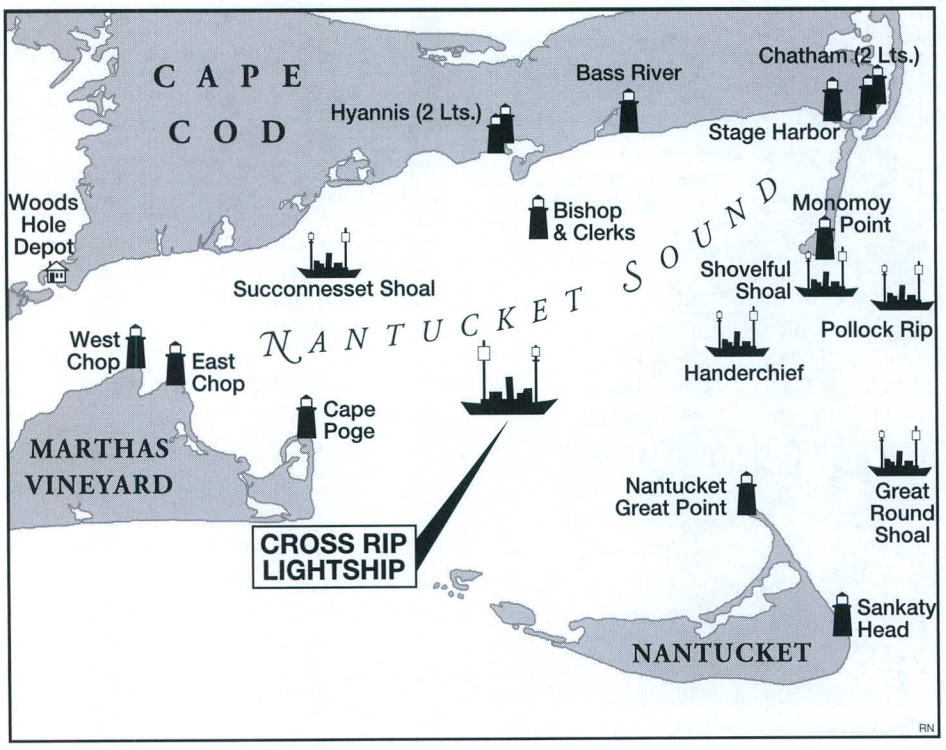
As evening wore on and I grew weary I decided that I had to go to sleep and the only place for sleep was in ***that*** room. I buttoned my chambray shirt up to the collar, rolled down the sleeves and buttoned the cuffs. I stuffed my dungaree pant legs into my socks and put on my watch cap and pulled it down as far as it would go. I went to bed. I was really sick at heart.

Needless to say, I soon grew accustomed to life aboard ship and the roaches no longer bothered me. At least we didn't have rats. My first bed was on the starboard side about where the second "S" in CROSS is. I later acquired a lower [berth] on the port side where the first "R" is (with port hole). The roaches no longer bothered me and I didn't bother them.

Two thirds of the crew were always aboard and one third ashore. It was usually four weeks at sea and two weeks ashore and that's when the tender serviced the ships. The exception being in those months with five weeks. Then you either got an extra week at sea or an extra one ashore. You could take leave time and go home or you stayed on TDY [temporary duty] at Base Woods Hole. Since I didn't have that much time accrued I stayed at Woods Hole. At the base we had liberty every evening but we had to "turn-to" every day.

CROSS RIP was six miles due south of Hyannis Port, Massachusetts and on a clear day with binoculars you could see it. During the summer months many of the yachts would pass close aboard to CROSS RIP and we waved and shouted greetings. But mainly I think we were there for the Woods Hole to Hyannis Port ferry. It was the only large vessel that I recall seeing there. I'm rather sure that we were not near the shipping lanes, thank God! The ferry was bad enough since she passed close aboard at every passing.

Some of the things which I've never, nor will ever, forget: Our leading seaman was a fellow named Buckley. I can't recall his first name. We seldom used first names. Well, one day Buckley was nowhere to be found. The whole crew looked everywhere, paint locker, chain locker, bosun's locker…you name it. We even went down to where the anchor chain passes out the bow of the ship just above the waterline. No Buckley.



Now Buckley was one heck of a seaman. I learned a lot from him. And he was a very upbeat fellow. We couldn't believe that he could either fall overboard or commit suicide. But the Captain was about ready to call in and report him lost.

Well just about then Buckley appears and nonchalantly asks what's all the commotion about. He had that "cat and canary look" on his face and he knew well what it was all about. He kept us guessing for several days before he spilled the beans. Can you guess? I'll let you know at the end of this story.

Speaking about going overboard. Remember the buddy I mentioned (my fellow recruit), who went on to HANDKERCHIEF? Well, one day the fellow who was on watch (the watch made sure everything was working, turned the fog horn on and off as needed, along with everything else, answered the radio and calls and noted everything on the ship's log) hollered for everyone to come listen to the radio. The HANDKERCHIEF was making frantic calls to Woods Hole. One of her crew had jumped overboard and was swimming ashore (6 miles?). It was my buddy. He couldn't take it. The isolation had gotten to him.

HANDKERCHIEF launched her lifeboat and brought him back and he was safe. I didn't find out that it was my friend for a few days. When I did, I felt really bad for him. I think they gave him a psychiatric evaluation and a medical discharge. I still feel bad for him and wonder whatever happened to him.

Aside from conversation and cards there was very little to do on off time. During my six months aboard we had no television, radio or movies. The fellows mostly played cribbage. I never learned how. But one of the highlights was when EN 1 Anthony Liguori would be seen in the galley making pizza dough. The rest of us would really get excited because Tony had his own way of making pizza. No cheese and he didn't make a sauce. He just added tomatoes and oil and seasonings and bake. Delicious! Tony was a really nice guy, quiet and mild and very good-looking — neat, too!

The other EN that I remember was Chief Luby. He was Tony's opposite but a

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helluva mechanic and on a lightship that's what really counts. So was Tony. Whenever things broke down those two would have it up and running in no time.

Oh, yes, also for entertainment we fished, but the only things I ever caught were sand sharks, sea robins and blowfish. We also would put the dory over the side and go swimming from it.

On one occasion I almost got washed overboard. A hurricane was coming. My first recollection of it was when we started talking about the weather advisories that we got over the radio. Whoever was on the watch would shout out the latest. I remember reports of it coming up the coast and it was a bad one. Someone said they heard it was the worst since '38. That didn't mean anything to me since I was only 8 years old then and I didn't even know what a hurricane was. My reaction was, "Great! We'll go in!" Everyone laughed at my naïveté. "Ships don't go in in bad storms. They go out. We stay here," someone said. I wasn't too happy. But I was excited.

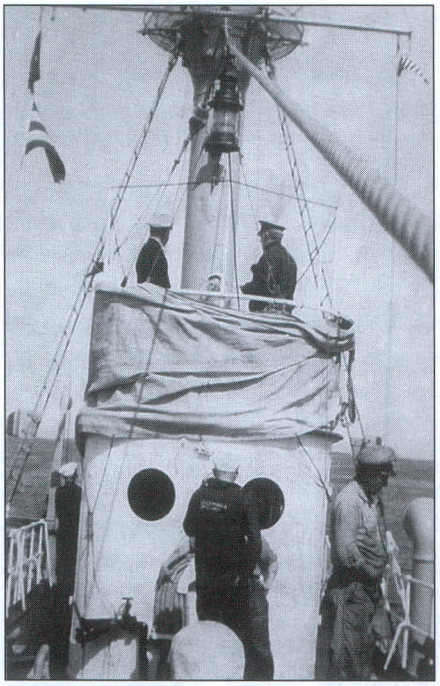
When it hit us, it started out during the day. The worst came during the night — ***all night***. It seems like storms are always worse at the night. The Captain ordered the engines started to keep from dragging the anchor chain. Our helm was open atop the pilothouse. Only the most experienced seamen would man the helm; Seaman Buckley, Chief Bo' sun's mate Bangs, and I can't recall who else, maybe Seaman Donald Tuttlebee. The rest of us were busy securing and resecuring and whatever else.

The Captain also gave the order to pay out more anchor chain. There was so much pressure on the chain that the windlass brake band broke and the only thing that held the chain was where it was secured in the chain locker. That and when someone finally threw the heavy steel safety chock.

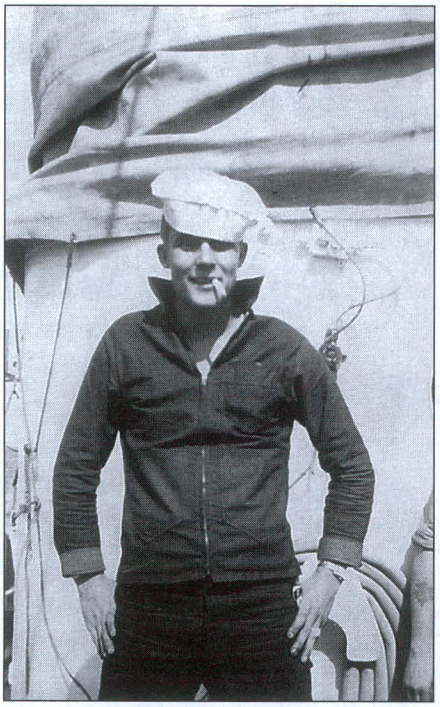
Well, I was on deck - for what I don't know now - on the port side aft of the pilothouse and about in the middle of [the] engine room housing, just about where the foghorns were. About that time a wave hit and I was standing in water which seemed hip deep. I don't really know how deep. But I had a good grip on the railing alongside the Engine Room House. And I wasn't going to let go. It seemed like I was in the grip of a big wet cold hand and it was trying to take me away. Finally, after what seemed [like] forever, it let go and I made it to the pilothouse. I looked up and saw the men at the helm and thought how tough it must be up there. I was glad I could stay below. The warm pilothouse never looked so good. It was a long night.

After the storm had passed and the seas had calmed, bearings were taken and we were off station. The full length of the anchor chain had been dragged out. I don't believe we dragged anchor but I'm not sure about that. I don't recall how we got back on station, if we ever did. You have to remember that these events are not in chronological order. And any errors must be attributed to a 69-year-old's memory [of events which occurred 50 years ago].

Then there was the best of all things, *Lightship #96* was put on availability. We were going to Boston for maintenance and dry dock. I think it was for 10 days. *Relief* came out and assumed CROSS RIP. We weighed anchor and were Boston-bound. We sailed past Martha's Vineyard and Buzzard's Bay, through the Cape Cod Canal, and north past Minot's



The *WAL 520 (LV 96)* bound for the shipyard at Boston in 1950. On the pilot house are (left) Chief Bangs and Captain (Chief Warrant Officer) Andreasen at right. In the middle, at the flying bridge helm, is BM 1 Milstead. The author is on deck left of the pilot house. At right is Chief Luby. The canvas was rigged as a wind break. Photo courtesy of Pat Varallo.



Fireman Richardson looking pretty cocky. Photo courtesy of Donald Tuttlebee.



Seaman Apprentice Pasquale (Pat) Varallo, demonstrating how not to handle lines at the Constitution Wharf shipyard, September 1950. Photo courtesy of the author.

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Ledge Lighthouse and into Boston Harbor. What a grand experience for a 19-year-old who always wanted to be a sailor.

We tied up at Coast Guard Base Constitution Wharf at the foot of Hanover Street (we always called it Hangover Street) about a mile from the infamous Scully Square. Scully Square by this time was no longer what it was famous for. Just before you come to Scully Square, about a block, is the Old North Church — "...one if by land, and two, if by sea..." I always thrilled at its sight.

Within a day or two we went cross-harbor to Chelsea and dry dock. Our gangway was about a 30-foot ladder, straight up. It wasn't bad going down, but after a night's liberty, it was very springy, and going up could be hazardous.

Thinking of the ladder reminds me of the time that Captain Andreasen was waiting by the ladder and SN Reagan was late for muster. Reagan was always late. He lived nearby in Dorchester, and went home every evening. The Cap'n told Buckley that Reagan had used every excuse except that he had gotten a flat tire. So Buckley got to Reagan before the Skipper and told him to tell the Captain that he had a flat tire. The Captain was a very nice man, and an old Lighthouse Service veteran, he was a Dane with an accent and he always had a pipe in his mouth. We were waiting on deck to see what would happen. So Reagan tells the "old man" his story and the Skipper's mouth drops open and the pipe hits the deck and we all had a great laugh.

I recall CROSS RIP with a fondness akin to your first kiss. I love her still. But I wanted to be a "deep water" sailor. One day while talking to Buckley I told him how I felt. Buckley was wise to the ways of the USCG. He told me the only way I would be transferred was to go to school and the fastest [route was to] get into sonar school. And also being a sonar man would most assuredly get me aboard a cutter. I applied for sonar school and was soon off to Key West for six months and then was assigned to the Cutter *Duane*. After a year I managed a transfer to the *Ramsden* and then [was] discharged [in 1953].

Where did Buckley hide?

He claimed to have wedged himself between the hull and the shank of the auxiliary mushroom anchor on the starboard bow. There is so little room there that none of us believed him, but that's the story we got.

The above is true as far as memory allows.



A 20-year-old Pat Varallo (left) and a classmate, SN O'Brien, in Key West, Florida, February 1951, taking a break from Sonar School. Pat thinks O'Brien was from somewhere in New England. Photo courtesy of the author.

When author Pat Varallo was on the Cross Rip station in 1950, off Cape Cod, he was aboard the hull *WAL 520* (designated *LV 96* in the Lighthouse Service years). The vessel was 101 feet long, one of the shorter lightships. She was constructed in 1914 for $71,000 to serve on the Great Lakes. She took the Buffalo station in Lake Erie, replacing the *LV 82,* which sank in a storm the previous year with the loss of all hands. After serving at Buffalo for one year, the *LV 96* was transferred to the Poe Reef station in Lake Huron (serving 1915 -1920), then to the Lake Huron station (serving 1921-1935). The ship was overhauled in 1936 and had new engines installed. She served on Cross Rip station form 1937 to 1954, when she was decommissioned and sold for scrap.

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The Crew of the Lightship Cross Rip #96-520

(or Cast of Characters)

Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) Edward Andreasen, Commanding Officer (CO)
A very nice man. A fatherly type. I'm not sure but he seemed to be about 60 years old. He was Danish, a veteran of the old Lighthouse Service.

Chief Boatswain's Mate (BMC) Donald Bangs, Executive Officer (XO)
The Chief, too, was a very nice man. Several years younger than the Skipper. He spent most of his time in the CG as a life boatman on duney [lifeboat] stations. He was from Chatham, MA. He was neat as a pin.

Chief Engineman (ENC) Luby
The Chief was a crusty sort of guy. Always needing a shave and unkempt, the opposite of Bangs. He was from Lubec, ME and a very good mechanic. He may have been a carryover from the old Lighthouse Service.

Boatswain's Mate First Class (BM1) Milstead
He became OIC in 1953-54. The Bo' sun was stocky and liked to drink scotch with a milk chaser. I think he came to *Cross Rip* after me. He had very bright red hair.

Engineman 1st Class (EN1) Anthony Liguori
A handsome and quiet man from Lynn, MA. "Lynn, the City of Sin," he used to say. Extremely neat and an excellent mechanic.

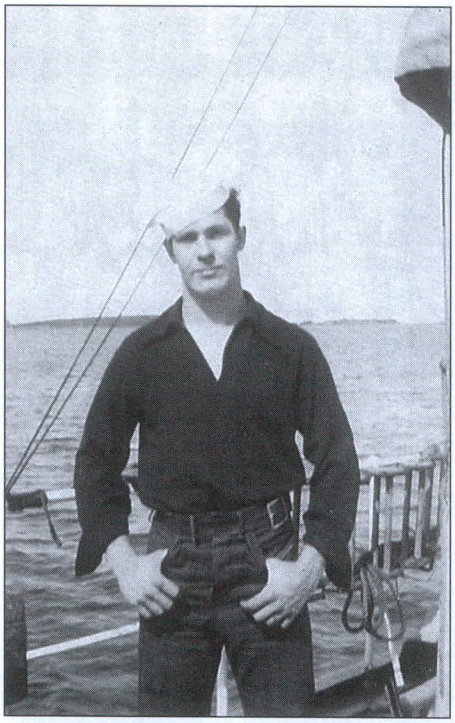
Seaman (SN) Buckley
Our leading seaman and he was from Worchester, MA.

Seaman (SN) Donald Tuttlebee
"Tut" was from Buffalo, NY. He lived on Delaware Avenue. I liked Tut a great deal. We spent a lot of time together. A mild fellow who could get very angry if you stepped on his toes.



Seamen Reagan and Tuttlebee on the *WAL 520* in the Cape Cod Canal. Tuttlebee photo.

Seaman Apprentice (SA) Pat Varallo
Pasquale was straight out of boot camp to the Cross Rip, a young Italian kid from Philadelphia.



SN Jansky aboard the Cross Rip Sept. 1950. Photo courtesy of Donald Tuttlebee.

Seaman (SN) Jansky
Jansky was from Roxbury, MA, a gregarious sort of fellow with a big grin. He was also quite garrulous. But in a nice way.

Seaman (SN) Reagan
Reagan was from Dorchester, MA. He was short and plump. He looked like the stereotypical Irishman. He was very likable and very late!

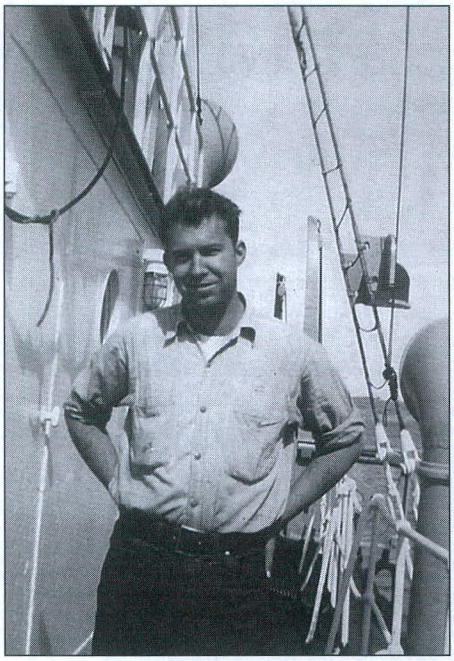
Seaman (SN) "Tex" Blanchard
Sometimes we called Blanchard "Hot Sauce." He was from Brownsville, TX. He loved hot sauce — put it on everything. Tex was an easy-going guy and very well liked. He spoke softly with a drawl and a country wit. I can't remember any of his witticisms, but they were all new to me.



The author chipping paint on the *WAL 520*. A never ending chore and assigned to the lowest ranked crewmen.

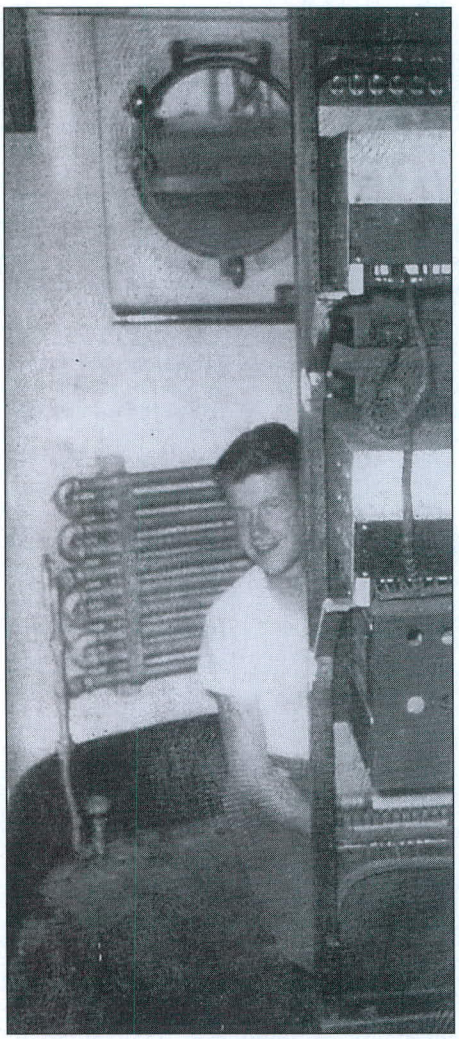
Commissary man 2nd Class (CS2) McCullock (or Mac Cullough)
He was a good cook and good looking. A Vermont native, he had red hair, not as bright as the Bo' sun's. He and the other cook alternated when both were aboard. The other times they had to work every day. Mac was a nice guy who had a way with the ladies. And he could fight like a demon. He didn't look for trouble but boy could he handle himself.

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Commissary man 2nd Class (CS2) (above) I can't call the other cook's name. He was probably 1st class. He, too, was a good cook.

I can't remember any other members of the crew. It seems that there should be more. My only regret is that I didn't keep in touch with my shipmates. If any of my old mates are out there, drop me a line in care of *The Keeper's Log*.



Donald Tuttlebee on watch behind the radio equipment in the pilot house of he *WAL 520.* Photo courtesy of Tuttlebee.

Post Scripts

Chain locker — I remember once, and this, too, was with Tuttlebee, when we were bringing in the anchor chain. The two of us were detailed to flake down the chain in the chain locker. This is a very unpleasant job. First, it is dangerous. Second, it is a nasty, dirty, wet cold job. I remember from boot camp that if by some freak accident the chain let go, you were a goner. I was happy when the work was finished. Likewise Tuttlebee.

Coffee Breaks — This was a very important part of the routine. A different seaman was designated each day to make the coffee. We had no urn or coffee maker. We made "hobo" coffee. Boil water in a pot, add the grounds, let steep a few minutes and pour through a strainer. Break was twice a day: mid-morning and mid-afternoon. The whole crew really looked forward to these breaks.

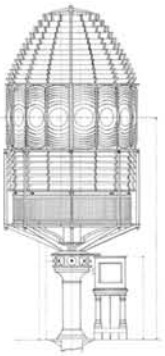
The paint locker — After painting, two seamen would have to go into the paint locker to clean up the brushes and secure the paint and everything else that was used. The fumes were overwhelming. I remember being assigned to do this with Tuttlebee and we got so giddy, everyone thought we had booze. But everyone knew what the fumes could do so they dismissed that thought.

About booze — Buckley got the bright idea to make raisin jack one day. Yeast, raisins, water and sugar — let stand about seven days or 'til raisins plump and burst. I drank a glass and in about ten minutes I was sitting on the head … and very, very sick. A terrible experience.

Foghorn — The foghorn took the worst verbal abuse aboard CROSS RIP. Even though it protected us, we hated to hear it. Sometimes, it was on for hours, or even days … [although] sometimes minutes. The watch was instructed to turn it on when a certain buoy was no longer visible to the naked eye, even though it was visible with binoculars. Spring and fall were the worst times for fog and it could roll in on you in a flash. You really had to stay alert. The foghorn was monotone and must have lasted three to four seconds. If it was turned on when you were asleep, it would wake you. If it was on when you went to sleep, and while you slept, it was turned off — it would wake you. You really couldn't win. It was always good to have it off.

Cockroaches Revisited — Lest anyone think I exaggerate when I write about the extent of the infestation aboard CROSS RIP, let me give a couple of examples: Every so often the cooks would fumigate the galley, which was quite small. I was detailed one time to sweep up the little corpses. I gathered them up into a pile on the deck and it was at least six inches high and a foot around. In the morning, there would be little babies in your toothbrush case and on your toothbrush. And when you got up and put on your shoes without shaking them out you had squashed bugs on your socks at night.

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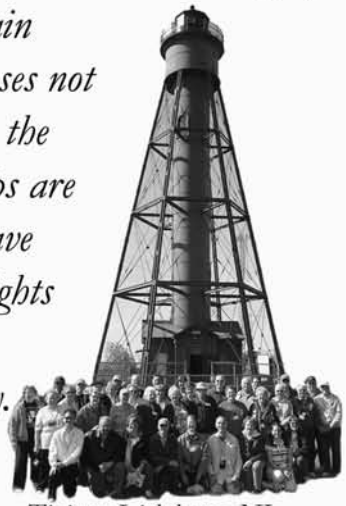
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