From Gus Pfister - (at Boon I. 1967-1968)

Landings

The most common method of getting to Boon Island from the mainland was by the weekly supply boat from Portsmouth Harbor Station. Getting from this boat, usually the 40' utility boat, onto the island was by one of the light station's small boats. These 16'(?) double ended rowing boats, equipped with extra wear boards on the underside, would be slid down the ways, meet with the supply boat to transfer supplies and personnel, and then landed back on the station, the most difficult part of the operation.

The light stations boathouse was located near the western end of the island, with the slipways going down in the northwest direction. This spot often saw the waves going across the end of the slip, caused by waves and swells that came washing around the island's western end. The trick in getting back onto the ways was to approach near the end, watch for a slight lull in the waves, then row madly onto the end, get hooked onto the winch, and ride up the ways. Most of the time, it was not too difficult.

To explain the equipment, the boathouse was located at the head of the ways, had a man door on the eastern end from the walkway and a large swing up door at the opposite end, with a small walk area around the head of the ways. Inside the boathouse were two sets of raised runners, one in line with the ways for the ready boat, and the other over to the side holding the spare boat. At the head of the ready boat runners sat the winch, with a Hercules four cylinder flat-head engine for power. The engine had a disc clutch on the output, leading to the first reduction gear set that brought the power across to the radiator end, to the second reduction gear. This shaft had a windlass head, while the other end passed through, and supported, the cable drum, with the drum engagement lever on the far end.

Preparation for launch was opening the ramp door, and starting the winch engine. The engine did have a hand crank, but, luckily, the electric starter always worked. Then, with the cable drum disengaged, the disc clutch to the windlass was engaged, and the boat was slid out onto the head of the ways. The winch cable was run out, and a trip rope was tied onto the cable drum engagement lever. When the supply boat arrived, we would put on life jackets,

one man would get ready in the boat, and the other wearing rubber boots would slide the boat partway down the ways. The hookup man would launch the boat down the ways as the wave would peak, as launching into an oncoming wave could result in wet people and possibly an upset boat. The man in the boat always rowed facing the island, rowing backwards going out, then face first on return, to better see where he was going and to be able to judge the waves and hookup.

The landing was the exciting part, especially since smooth calm water was unusual. The hookup man, standing at the waters edge, would be holding the winch cable's snap hook in one hand, and the trip rope in the other. The rower would try select a gentle wave, and then row furiously to hit the ways on the crest of it. If it went as planned, the hookup man would snap the hook into the bow eye bolt, pull the trip rope engaging the drum, and go back up the ramp to control the winch. The people in the boat held on tight, as the boat would begin to ride the retreating wave back down, until the cable slack was taken up, and the boat would instantly reverse direction. If all went well, the boat would be winched up to just outside the door, unloaded, and then gently winched in across the gap, and onto the runners inside the boathouse.

But, there were occasions when it did not quite go as planned. The rower had to watch carefully for the wave next to the one he chose to ride in on, and if it looked to be more than he liked, he would pull back out. Since he was facing the island, he had greater pulling power to go back out. We still had occasions when we got the boat hooked, but before we could get it on up the ramp, the next wave would knock the boat sideways off the ways. Since the winch could not be stopped instantly, we would end up pulling the boat onto the rocks beside the ways. Then we would empty the boat, get some handy spare planks out of the boathouse, and proceed to set guides, and winch and pry the boat back over to the ramp. The last step, getting up onto the ways, was the most difficult, and the long boards would be set as guides and manually held in place as the winch would pull it up. A little bit of work, but the only way to get it back in the boathouse without great damage.