

By Dianna Miller

The following is taken from notes I made while aboard the Coast Guard Cutter, Blackhaw, August 24, 1983 - - - We boarded Cape Cross at 8 AM - skies overcast - mild swells. We joined the Blackhaw at St George Reef about 9:20 AM. The Cape Cross came alongside and each of us descended a rope ladder into a small transport boat. Bob Bolen, Wayne Wheeler, Craig and I were taken to the Blackhaw and the small boat maneuvered into position alongside the great, black structure. Here, boarding was a bit more difficult. A large lip on the boat, combined with rolling swells, made timing essential. A wood and rope ladder was lowered, and when the swells were right, one at a time, we leaped for the ladder and were helped aboard by crewmen.

We were then taken down to the galley where a combination of the heat and the rolling motion of the ship made me slightly seasick. Better be on deck in the fresh, salty air. We headed back on top and sat near the stern of the ship while a crew member fished for his supper nearby. About 200 yards away, lay St George Lighthouse. Its granite form loomed powerfully above the tossing sea and white spray. The Coast Guard crew was, at that moment, preparing to dismantle and lower the great light: A first order lens, the largest made. It was to be taken to a prepared place at the Historical Society's main museum downtown.

We were interested in smaller artifacts to display at the lighthouse at Battery Point Lighthouse. We were told all radio gear, weather gear and lifesaving equipment had been removed from St George years ago. As safety ropes were being secured, I gazed with some trepidation at the churning sea and the jagged rocks we would soon be attempting to climb. Even on a calm day, St George Reef Lighthouse is a humbling sight. Like Mt Everest rising out of the billowing deep. Mistakes would not be forgiven - - - -

As we waited for the tide to get high enough for us to reach the stone steps on Seal Rock, we were told we would join the Blackhaw's Captain for lunch. A delicious Oriental meal was served, but I was excited and still slightly sea sick, so it was difficult to eat. Soon it was time to board the lighthouse. It would be tricky, at best, and the Captain advised us not to jump onto the rock if we had the slightest doubt we could land successfully. The boat was waiting. Our chance had arrived!

We were taken to Seal Rock and told to jump at the moment the boat's small bow bumped against the rock. Only two at a time could land because the waves kept pulling the boat away every third or fourth surge. When it was my turn, heart pounding, I jumped as hard as I could and made a grab for the safety rope held by a Coast Guard crewman. Success! My footing held and I scrambled for the iron staircase which led up to the lighthouse's great door. The odor of seals was very strong. On the main deck, we took off our life vests and went inside.

The first sensation was one of darkness and decay. Flashlights came on and when our eyes adjusted, we could make out shapes around us. The Boatswain's locker was just ahead, a row of huge generators to our right, and a wooden stairway to our left. Directly in front, a life-size dummy in Coast Guard coveralls was hung by the neck; a parting joke by the last lighthouse crew in 1975. We looked into the Boatswain's locker and it was empty, except for a few molding American flags. Next we mounted the staircase and headed for the second level, finding a laundry room complete with washer, dryer and an old refrigerator. A box of laundry soap stood nearby. Around the corner and three steps down, we came to a door which led outside to another deck. It was here we found the machinery and the enormous boom used to load personnel and supplies onto the lighthouse. The boom was completely rusted. Its metalwork looked as fragile as a spider's web. After taking a few pictures, we went inside and continued up the narrow, winding staircase into the darkness above.

The room we discovered next was the kitchen. It looked recently occupied, with an old-fashioned tea kettle on the stove, cannisters full of flour, sugar, coffee and tea bags; even a selection of spices in the cupboard. There were old newspapers and magazines scattered on the counter top. A simple table and chairs stood in the middle of the room and on the wall, a bulletin board displayed a variety of Coast Guard papers. The rest of the group continued on while I checked for more artifacts. All of the windows were boarded up, so it was quite dark. Some of the drawers were swollen with moisture and impossible to open, so I had to content myself with exploring the open ones. A full set of cooking pans, silverware and plastic dishes were neatly stacked on kitchen shelves. An old green garbage can was tucked under the sink with the usual kitchen cleansers beside it. Everywhere, the smell of decay prevailed. I finally satisfied my curiosity and went up to the next level: the bedrooms.

I found showers, toilets, beds and several chest of drawers in each bedroom. In one room, there was a filing cabinet and a couple of empty model boxes. Pillows were still on the beds. Fallen plaster from the walls and ceilings lay scattered over everything, adding to the eerie atmosphere. How sad to see this incredible building, a monumental engineering feat, slowly crumbling to dust.

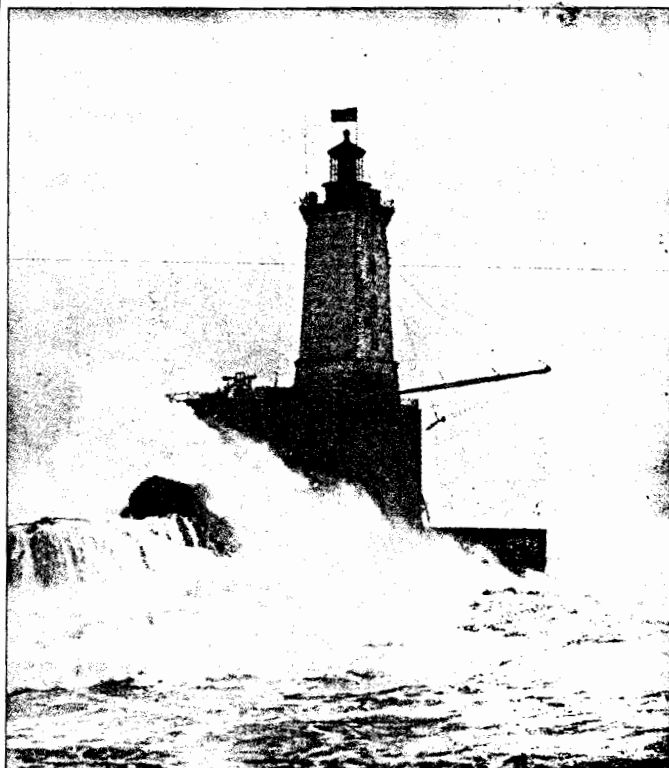
Now, only one room remained: the lantern. I ascended the staircase and peeked inside. There was a bustle of activity as Coast Guard crewmen set about dismantling the light. The first order lens was so big it dwarfed the room and workers. Glass and brass gleamed despite years of neglect. I wanted to spend more time exploring, but the Coast Guard Commander said we must leave because the tide would soon hamper our departure. I photographed as much as I could and committed the rest to memory.

Back outside, we donned our life vests and one by one, we made our precarious leap for the small transport boat. It was a little more difficult this time because the sea was rougher and waves kept washing over the slippery stone steps. I'd like to say we made it to the Cape Cross without mishap, but such was not the case. Craig, Bob and I all carried painful reminders of our adventure. While Bob went below to get his hand bandaged, Craig and I sat on the deck feeling the salt spray on our faces. An exhilarating sense of freedom took hold as the cutter sped home to Crescent City.

Coast Guard Member Gets Broken Wrist Set

Stanley Spencer, stationed at the St. George lighthouse, one of the three crew members here, fell and broke his wrist Tuesday.

Outside contact from the mainland occurs only three times daily, so it was necessary for the lighthouse personnel to radio to Eureka, who contacted the local Coast Guard station. Spencer was taken to the Seaside hospital where his arm was given first aid and x-rays. He was later rushed to St. Joseph's hospital in Eureka for further treatment. St. Joseph's is hospital headquarters for Coast Guard personnel.



St. George Reef lighthouse located 6 miles off the California-Oregon border. This impressive structure was constructed between 1882 and 1892 and is America's most expensive lighthouse. Official U.S. Coast Guard photo.

Dear Wayne,

I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the informative letter you wrote and the Post Card (of St. George Reef) tells the whole story. A very ignoble end for a masterpiece of construction.

I note the ornamental railing of the main deck has rusted away. The many hours of chipping and painting that I did failed to save it. I suppose the lantern room is a mass of rust and will soon join the railing.

I spent many stormy days and nights on the reef. My room was two floors below the lantern room and on many occasions we had to shut the solid shutters on the windows as heavy spray was hitting the glass panes.

We caught our drinking water on the main deck, the rain water flowed into a gutter around the outer rim of the (caisson) deck and then through pipes to a cistern below the engine room. Our gasoline, diesel fuel and lubricating oils (all in 55 gallon drums) were stored around the edge of the deck. As they were dirty and oily they polluted our drinking water. Salt water spray landing on the deck also didn't help the potability. I don't know what was worse, the food or the water.

Chester was the head man during my sojourn there. He was a member of the old USLHS and was stationed there for many years. He was a whiz at marinspike seamanship, an excellent small boat handler and he kept the station machinery humming. I learned a lot from him. His full name was Chester Johnson, really a fine man.

My roommate was Roy Crockett, he was a great guy and a self taught violinist? He had a record player with an amplifier and he played third violin with Fritz Kreisler and Joshua Heifitz. I'm sure the strains of the third violin drove many a mariner and as they sailed by in those lumber schooners heading south from Oregon and Washington.

The man that was listed as missing on the trip between St. George Reef and Crescent City was George Roch. He was presumed to have hit a sunken rock, the launch broke up and since there were so many sharks in the area his body was never found. He was quite a character according to the owner of the *Oasis* in Crescent City, my favorite watering hole.

There were times in the fog when we would lose our bearing for the station. We would make for Castle Rock and then veer west and home in on the fog horn. We had lots of close calls getting on and off the station. We always had two men in the boat which was lowered to 15 feet above the ocean. The engine man would then start the engine and the winch man, on the station, would wait for the right wave and drop the launch. The deck man (on the boat) would pull a lanyard that was threaded through the end of the winch hook. As the launch hit the wave the line would slack, the ring would pop off and the cox'n would engage the clutch and gun it. Then we would say a short prayer of thanks. If the man who was handling the hook was short and weak things got VERY hairy. Getting back aboard was worse, especially if one had a hangover from the shore leave.

Robert Foltz

Beverly Hills, FL

Stationed aboard St. George Reef Lighthouse 1943-45.

CAPT. GEO. ROUX, LIGHT KEEPER, DIES SUDDENLY

Capt. Georges Roux, 62, for nearly thirty years keeper of the Point St. George light house, died suddenly at the Knapp hospital here early Monday morning following a brief illness. Capt. Roux was badly battered a few days previous to his death when he attempted to reach the light house following several weeks shore leave and it is believed this experience brought on exhaustion from the effects of which he never recovered.

Capt. Roux was able to be around following his attempt to reach the light, but evidently suffered injuries which brought on a fatal illness.

Cause of his death was chronic nephritis complicated by terminal pneumonia.

The following story of his terrible experiences was told to a Triplicate reporter last week by Capt. Roux but was crowded out of last week's issue:

Capt. Roux left the Hobbs, Wall wharf in the harbor about ten o'clock Tuesday morning in the small launch with a load of groceries. In spite of heavy seas he made the lighthouse all right but came near losing his life in the boiling surf when an attempt was made to fasten lines to the launch and haul it to the light landing.

After several hours' struggle Capt. Roux finally gave up and returned to the harbor, arriving about six o'clock that evening, his boat filled with water, the groceries a total loss, feeling glad to be alive after the worst experience in his long career as keeper of the dangerous light on the tiny speck of rock ten miles offshore.

Capt. Roux, who was a native of France, had no relatives in this section. Funeral services were held Wednesday afternoon from the Roeder Funeral Home, with interment in the Catholic cemetery.

—O—
RECEIVED FOR NAME

Information from Duane Ferguson, 149 E., Crescent City, Ca. 95531 458-3443

Duane served on Point St. George from April 1955 to Feb. 1957 and again 1962 to 1963. He was on the lighthouse at Mary Island, Alaska. Was on Blunts Light ship for 22 months, 1964 to 1965. Discharged as Chief Warrant Officer June 30, 1951.

Point St George Lighthouse;

164' above Mean tide.

Boom 90' above mean tide. Originally 90' long. Extended to 110'. Boom pointed East by South East.??????

6 men were assigned to the lighthouse. 4 on duty. 14 Days on & 14 Off. While off duty they stayed at the Coast Guard Radio Station at Point St George. The American flag flew on Relief day only.

As told by Duane and going back into his memory:

There was no mortar between the granite stones. The cracks filled with a lime substance. A very fine fit. He said the stones were pinned together with copper pins about 1" in diameter and extended into the stone about 3" into each stone. This was on adjoining sides.

MENDOCINO LIGHTHOUSE

He later stated they were on duty for 28 days. He estimated the MENDOCINO Lighthouse keepers houses were burned about 1962. Each house had a full basement but do not show now as they were pulled up.

BACK TO POINT ST. GEORGE REEF LIGHTHOUSE

The weights that ran the lens were cylinders from 8" to 10" and had a notch cut to the center to fit onto the weight cable. They were added until the desired rotation was reached. Made of lead. They were in a vertical tube that went alongside the circular stone stairs and inside the square tower. This was down to the floor of the second floor level. This was about 40'. The weight cable went from the lens drum vertically to a pulley, horizontally to the vertical pipe where the circular stair wall met the straight side of the lighthouse.

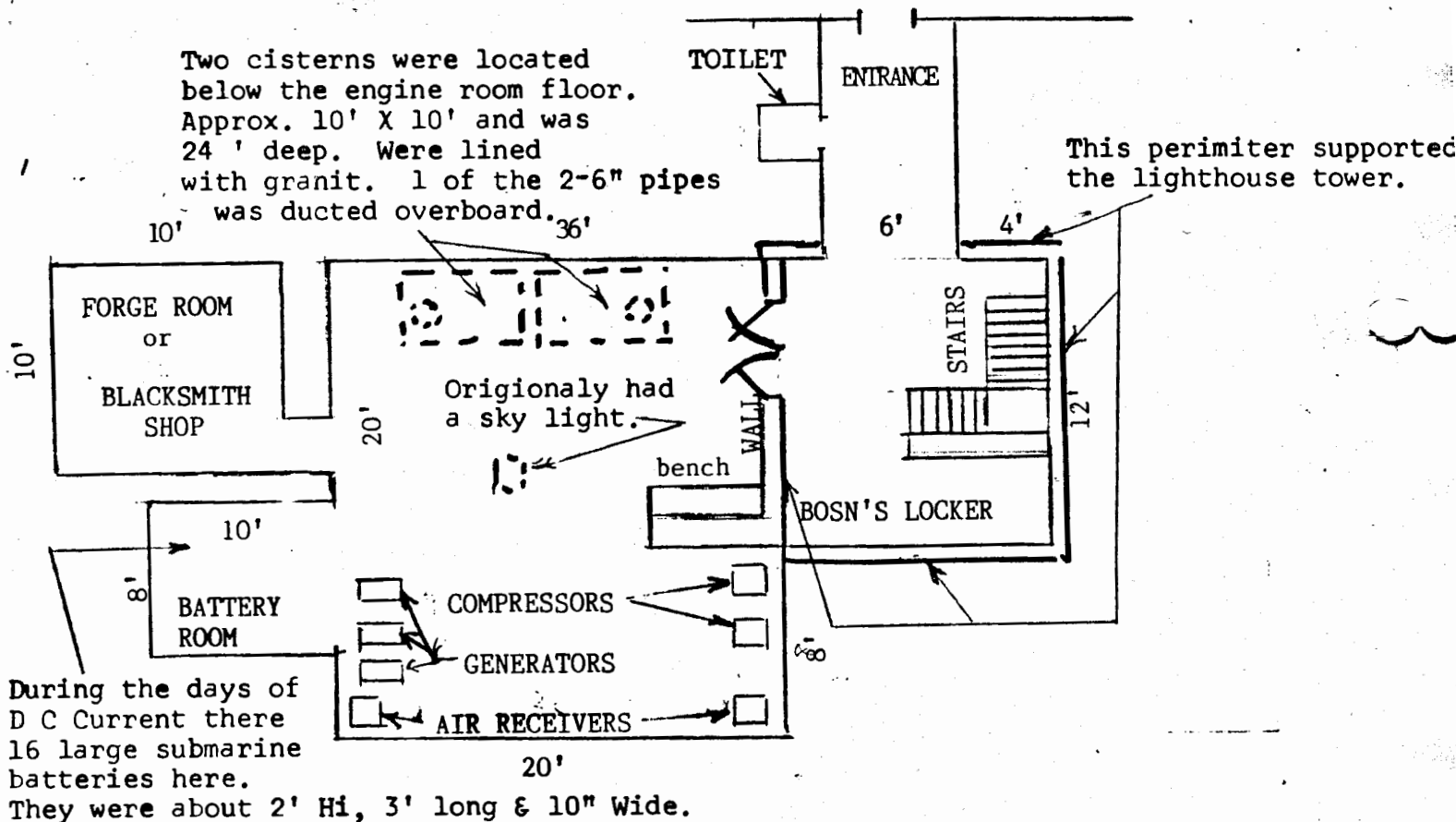
When electricity was installed in 1940 it was 110 D.C. This went to huge storage batteries in the battery room. The diesels could not be run while the light was on. (lens light) 3 Hercules Diesel, Model D1X4 pulled two generators. When they went to AC power three GMC diesels were installed. At least one ran continuously.

The boom hoist engines were (2) were ran by air. The compressor was ran by a coal fired steam engine.

JAMES SMALLSREED, got to spend time at the lighthouse as his Uncle was stationed there.

He says the pins or dowels pinning the stones together were hexagonal and were from 1" to 4 or 5" in Diameter. Were made of bronze and were quite long. After being installed molten sulphur was poured alongside each pin. He estimated the weights to be 500 pounds. I have read or heard 1,500 pounds. He said there was a thin layer of mortar between the stones.

POINT ST GEORGE LIGHTHOUSE
THE VAULTED AREA IN THE CASON BELOW THE
LIGHTHOUSE



LIVING QUARTERS IN THE TOWER

Water was pumped up into a 20 gallon redwood tank in the watch room. It was heated by coils in a diesel fired stove. A smoke stack extended up through the top of the tower. Hot water was fed down the pipe to a very small cast iron bath tub. After 1952 water was heated by a crane boiler and went to a shower. Each room had a diesel fired stove & used a common smoke pipe.

THE MAIN OUTER DECK

The main outer deck was a catch basin. The first hard rain the deck was scrubbed down and ducted overboard. When it was considered clean it was collect in the two large cisterns. Duane Ferguson said each or both tanks or cisterns held 54,000 gallons of water. It seems a bit much.

THIS IS NOT TO SCALE

Sunday - 1-8-89

Dear Nadine:

Certainly nice to hear from you
and may I Congratulate you & your
husband on doing a job that is very
appreciated, by mariners who pass in
the night. You have a lovely place
to reside, and no noisy neighbors.

I'm sure the tourists take a keen
interest in the tour of the light.
Unless we have more people like
you all, they will become just a
Memory.

My wife is an artist and I've been
trying to get her to paint St. George,
but she thinks it is too drab looking.
I'll succeed one of these days.

You know, I can still remember
seeing the little white haired keeper
beating it up Front St. to beat the
tide. I visited him on several
occasions, he was a fine gentleman
and kept the place shipshape.

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Crescent City, does not look the same as I remember it, of course after forty five years, I don't look the same either.

I assume the tidal wave changed it. I often wonder if the local newspaper, (used to be the *Del Norte Tri-Weekly*), has any literature on the wave that I could send for.

On the post cards you sent, it appears the old wooden pier we used to hoist our launch upon is gone, it appears the jetty is still there, but with a roadway on it. I think I recognize the Catholic Church, the upper left side of the card, and the hospital, just up from your light, much larger now. I don't recognize any of the business places I was familiar with, the Trehearnes Dept store movie theater, Martinelli's Oasis bar, Art Hanson's Sportman's Bar, Oniel's Cafe, McElvany's Ice Cream store and the Lauff Hotel, owned by the Godwins, all live people.

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I loved that little City, and most of ³¹ the people that lived there. I feel that like all the other things I knew, are gone, but they will remain in my memories.

I had some snaps that I took while on the Reef, but after moving on many occasions, they have been lost, I have but one left, you may keep it.

I'm leaning on a gasoline drum, in background is the beautiful white stone of the tower, also sending another, to compare then & now, the dog is "Rex."

Madine: I would love to spin a yarn or two, but days on the reef were very dull on most occasions, routine maint., work, standing radio watch, starting air compressors to furnish air to the fog horns, and awaiting the launch arrival, with Chow & mail from our loved ones.

There were many times when the men ashore could not get out because of bad weather.

There were times when I was ashore,

and running out of money, as we ⁴¹
were given a very, very, small allowance
for food and room, Mrs. Godwin at
the Lauff Hotel, only charged us \$1.00 a
nite for a room. God bless her. I made
\$96.00 / MONTH and that did not go
very far.

The people of Crescent City as a group
were the finest I've ever known. The
new residents of today owe much to
those pioneers, I hope with the
growth rate, and new facilities, that
City has not changed, in personality.
I'm sure the tower on Seal Rocks
no longer with her light, will
withstand the westerly gales, and in
summer a welcome gray fog will
settle around her once gleaming
tower, to hide the years of neglect.
Although with splashes of rust
blotting her sides, she will be forever
a monument to those who served
her, and to those young men who died
leaving her.

She was my home for a period of my
youth, and like Crescent City fills my
old age, with lovely memories.

I wish to thank you and your spouse, Nadine, for the literature and the wonderful Post Cards, that Fresnel lens, looks as good as the last time I saw it.

May God bless you both, and keep the light burning in your window.

best wishes,

Bb Foltz