



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

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U.S. Coast Guard Lightships & Those of the U.S. Lighthouse Service

U.S. COAST GUARD LIGHTSHIP LV-78 (WAL-505)

"A Snapshot of Life Aboard the USCG Lightship Relief LV-78 / WAL-505 From April 1957 to April 1959."

Photos and information are courtesy of Jay McCarthy, USCG

The Coast Guard Historian's Office is pleased to present this photo gallery about life on board a Coast Guard lightship in the 1950's. Coast Guardsman Jay McCarthy recently donated to our office a series of photographs he took while he served on board the LV-78 for two years, from 26 April 1957 to 23 April 1959. His photos, along with his descriptions of each, provide the viewer with a unique glimpse into life on board a Coast Guard lightship in the late-1950. Since lightships no longer serve, having been replaced by radio and satellite-based aids to navigation, Mr. McCarthy's donation is all the more important. Now future generations can get a feel for what life was like in the "Old Guard" on what were affectionately (and not so affectionately) known as "sunburned watermelons," a term playing off the ships' red hulls.

This photo gallery begins with Mr. McCarthy's description of a typical day on board the lightship and then moves on to his photo album and his captions for each. We have included all of his photos as well as the written material he supplied to us, changing only some of the punctuation. The quotations from his writings are enclosed in quotation marks.

We hope that you will enjoy this brief glimpse into the past, courtesy of a Coast Guard veteran. It will only be through the efforts of veterans such as Mr. McCarthy that we can preserve the full and complete history of the Coast Guard's now vanishing past. Thank you!

McCarthy joined the Coast Guard reserve while still in high school. From 24 February 1955 through 23 April 1957 he served on active-duty with Port Security Unit 03-408. He then transferred to duty on board the Lightship LV-78 / WAL-505, arriving there on 24 April 1957. He tells us of duty on board a lightship:



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

"Quite often, duty on a Lightship followed a daily routine that for the most part was as normal as anybody working on their regular job ashore. The difference came when we experienced time frames of sheer terror and deadly hazards.

On a normal day with good weather, if you were standing the 04:00 to 08:00 watch, you would be treated to a beautiful sunrise, and depending on the time of year and station, a lobster boat, on its way to work its traps, would pull alongside and throw today's newspaper (the crew would have read it on the way out) onto our deck. They never stopped, just a wave and a shouted greeting. Their generosity was greatly appreciated by a Lightship crew that now had today's newspaper, and a connection to the world. What a treat! Later in the day would be the daily maintenance tasks, etc., followed by standing the 16:00 to 20:00 watch, where you would be treated to an incredibly beautiful sunset. Quite often on Ambrose Station, you would observe the beautiful ocean liners outbound or inbound to New York Harbor. One evening on Ambrose Station, I had to sound the general alarm, as the outbound ocean liner *Stockholm* (yes, the same *Stockholm* that sank the *Andrea Doria*), came so close to us that we could look directly into the port holes of the passengers' staterooms and see the occupants. A sheer terror moment! The wake of the liner rocked us back and forth for quite some time afterwards.

Raging storms could last for days, with waves breaking over the bow, and then as the bow rose up from under this enormous weight, tons of water would wash down the deck and off the stern. Then the bow would be buried under the next wave and the procedure would repeat itself over and over again. On the first day, everyone would continue to eat, and the cook would place a dampened table cloth on the mess deck table, to keep plates and food from sliding off. As the days of the storm continued, less crewmen would be taking their meals, and would switch to apple and saltines. I don't care what anybody says, if the storm was violent enough and lasted long enough, almost nobody was exempt from being sea sick. Eventually, the seas would calm, winds would blow themselves out, and once more we would be treated to another incredibly beautiful sunset.

On other days, the fog would be so thick, you couldn't see the stern from the wheel house. At times like these, I often would leave the wheel house and spend some time up in the bow (as far away as possible from the loud braying of our foghorn), and listen for the bells and horns of nearby ships. I'm guessing that Bobby Pierce probably did the same thing in the early morning hours of 24 June 1960. Pierce heard the horn of the approaching SS *Green Bay* and was able to sound the general alarm, two minutes before the collision that sank the ship."



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

McCarthy's captions for the following photos are enclosed in quotation marks; any official Coast Guard captions and other information are so noted (if any).



*Easter Sunday, 1957 ... Relief 78/505, being assisted by 110' USCG Tug through "Hell Gate" on East River, NYC ... Returning from relieving Cornfield Point Lightship Station, off Old Saybrook, CT, to USCG Base St. George, Staten Island, N.Y.
L-R. W.A. Wicks, CHBOSN-W1, Oinc, Lee Burbage, BM1 & Ed Brown, CS2*

U.S. Coast Guard photo; Photo No. 3CGD-02125603; photographer unknown.

"This photo was taken while we were on Ambrose Station in the spring of 1958. The three crewmen on deck are (to the best of my recollection), L-R: Ray Durbano, Bud Fairfull & Jay McCarthy (standing on something?) looking at the USCG plane taking the photo."



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations



"Full broadside view of the ship in color."

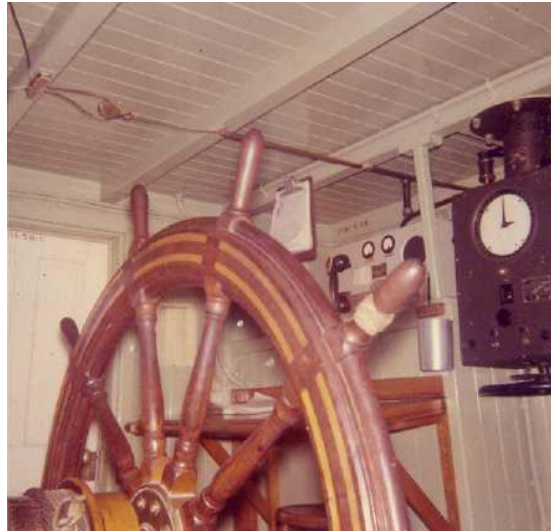
"The . . . [next] three pictures are of the interiors of the wheel house and aft deck (radio beacon) house. Both were WOODEN structures, again standard 1904 issue, with NO insulation . . . [This photo shows the] wheel house with view of the beautiful wooden when and wood compass stand (mahogany, I think) . . . observe the radiator running horizontally below the port holes, they didn't put out much heat. I sued to lean up against the radiator while standing the midnight watch. The cold winter winds would blow right through the wooden bulkheads. Whenever I get cold, I think it was never as cold as standing a winter mid watch on the old Relief 78/505."





U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations



"Wheel house . . . wheel, radio and log station . . . note the wooden planking on the overhead and aft bulkhead."



"Aft deck house, view of radio room . . . note the WOOD planking on overhead and bulkheads. This planking went through to the outside, in other words, this planking was both the interior and exterior bulkhead. No insulation."

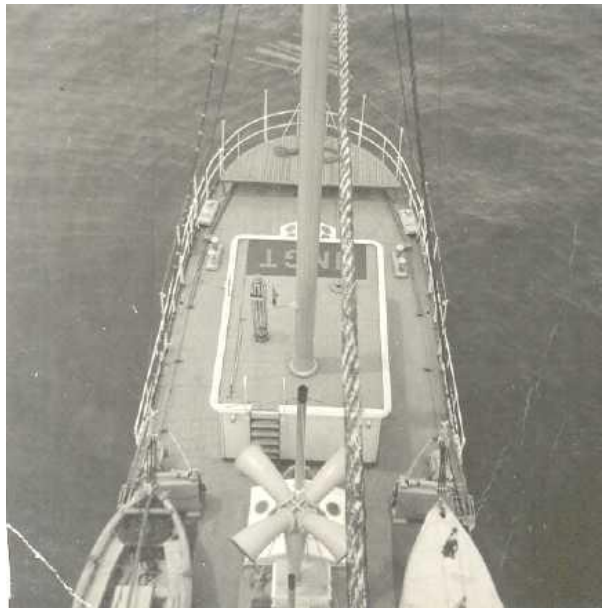


U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations



"Windlass room . . . below deck, in bow and just forward of the mess deck. Note, anchor chain on the lower left was for the spare / emergency anchor . . . anchor chain on the right was for the main (5,000 lb. mushroom) anchor."



"These views from the forward stick (mast) . . . don't remember when or what station we were on, when I took them. Back then, I (we) used to climb aloft all the time for various maintenance tasks and we used to hand in a bosun's chair while painting the masts. There is no way I would climb aloft today. I own a one-story house and don't even like to climb up on my roof! [This is the view] of rear lantern from forward stick."



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations



"[From the top of the forward stick, this is the] view of bow from forward stick."
Note the spare mushroom anchor secured to starboard.



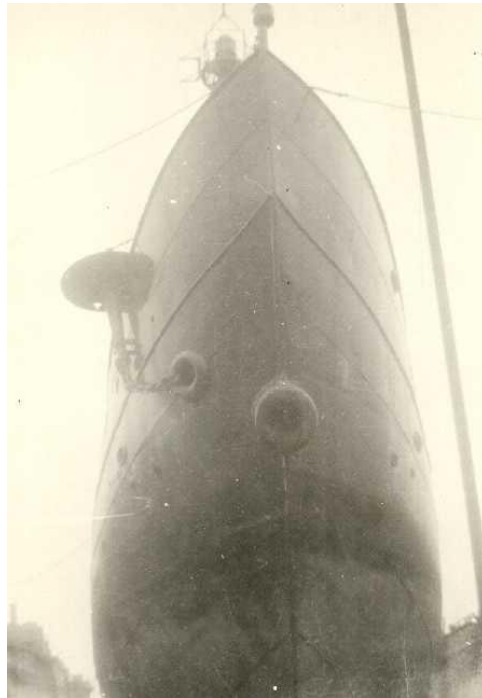
Easter Sunday, 1957 ... aboard Relief 78/505, East River, NYC
Standing L-R, Ed Brown & Edmund (Leo) Burhage
Kneeling L-R, Frank Baglio, J.A. Flores & Jose Robles



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

"Some of the crew members posed for this picture in the bow. As the ship continued the trip down the East River, NYC, on their return to Base St. George, SINY. . .Easter Sunday, 1957 . . . Standing, L-R, J.P. Smith & Edmund (Lee) Burbage; Kneeling, L-R, Frank Baglio, J.A. Flores, & Jose Robles."

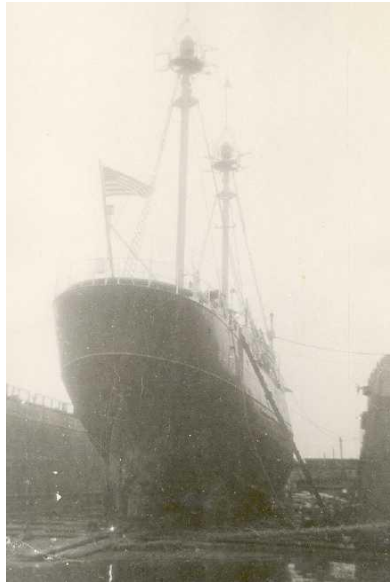


"The Relief 78/505 while in Brewers Shipyard Dry Dock #5, Staten Island, NY, August, 1957. If memories serve me correctly (46 years), I recall, that while the hull was being sand blasted, a penetration was made below the engine room. That damaged plate was replaced. The Relief 78/505, built in 1904, used the same type steel (processing) that was used on the Titanic. Steel today is processed much differently, resulting in a much stronger steel. I have often wondered, if there was more damage to the hull, as a result of the [1960] collision, than the Navy diver, performing the 'Post Collision Damage Survey' was able to see!"



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations



"The Relief 78/505 while in Brewers Shipyard Dry Dock #5, Staten Island, NY, August, 1957.



Fishing, Christmas Day, 1957
Ambrose Station ... L-R,
Bud Fairfull, Jay McCarthy & Lee Burbage

"Christmas Day 1957 activities . . . Fishing, probably like a lot of lightship sailors, I did enough fishing aboard to last me a lifetime. L-R, Bud Fairfull, Jay McCarthy, & Lee Burbage."



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations



*Christmas Day, 1957
Ambrose Station ... L-R,
Dalomba, Ray Durbano & Jay McCarthy*

"Christmas Day 1957 activities . . . Hanging out on the mess deck, waiting for Christmas dinner . . . Note the standard 1904 issue wooden louvered compartment door (great for water tight compartments), behind that skinny kid on the right. L-R, Dalomba, Ray Durbano, & Jay McCarthy. On a lightship, the OinC was normally a CWO, the XO a BMC, and we had an ENC. These gentlemen normally ate their meals in the ward room, located in the stern of the ship. The remainder of the crew ate in the mess deck, located amidships. On Christmas Day, 1957, only the XO, Louis C. Carter, BMC, was aboard. For most of the (young) crew aboard that day, it was not only our first Christmas at sea, but also, our first Christmas away from home. Chief Carter's decision to come forward from the ward room, and share Christmas dinner with the crew on the mess deck, was most appreciated by his young crew."



*WINTER, VIEW OF ICE AROUND SHIP
Scotland Station, February 1958*



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

"Winter on Scotland Station, February '58; Since Scotland Station was closer in to shore, we used to get a lot of 'ice floes' drifting (banging off the sides of the ship at night) past the ship. Hope you can see the New Jersey coast in the pic, barely visible at the top of the floes."



WINTER, MOTOR WHALE BOAT ...
Weekly Transfer to Buoy Tender
Scotland Station, February 1958
View, Bow to Stern ... Bobby Pierce,
G.R. Brower, CHBOSN W-1, Oinc
& Jay McCarthy

"Winter, motor whaleboat, weekly transfer to buoy tender, Scotland Station, February '58; Looking at this picture reminded me of winter at sea . . . handling the 'falls' in ice cold weather, going through the process of launching and recovering the small boat, with ice on the lines, ice underfoot, ice cold winds and worth every minute of it for liberty, fresh food and mail. Ahh, memories. PS: Skipper was very tolerant, that's a white 'USA Drinking Team' sweatshirt, with hood, that I'm wearing under my foul weather jacket. Wouldn't get away with that on a bigger ship. View, bow to stern, Bobby Pierce; G.R. Brower, CHBOSN W-1, OinC, & Jay McCarthy."



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations



Ward Room

Overfalls Station, March 1958 ... L-R,
Louis C. Carter, BMC → Raymond L. Thrush, ENC

"Ward Room, Overfalls Station, March, 1958, L-R Louis C. Carter, BMC, Raymond L. Thrush, ENC. BMC Carter was a great chief, tough but fair. He also had a soft side . . . What he did for us young guys (providing a touch of home), away from home and at sea at Christmas for the first time, was really a great gesture. I think he would be proud to know that his act of kindness to the crew (including us young guys), would be shared with so many others, all these years later."



Mess Deck Card Game

Overfalls Station, March 1958 ... L-R,
R.T. Boismeno, Ogdensburg, N.Y.,
Edward J. Brown, Philadelphia, PA.?,
Raymond F. D'urbano, Rochester, N.Y.,
Bobby R. Pierce, Franklin, VA.,
Ralph E. (Bud) Fairfull, Long Island, N.Y.



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

"Mess Deck Card Game: Overfalls Station, March 1958. Almost every night you would find a card game on the mess deck. Of course, no money was exchanged, it just helped to pass the time. Good memories! L-R, R. T. Boismeno, Ogdensburg, NY; Edward J. Brown, Philadelphia, PA (?); Raymond F. D'urbano, Rochester, NY; Bobby R. Pierce, Franklin, VA; Ralph E. (Buc) Fairfull, Long Island, NY."



*Lowering Small Boat ...
Weekly Transfer to 175' Bouy Tender Arbutus W203
Scotland Station, July 1958 ...*

L-R, Bud Fairfull, G.R. Brower, CHBOSN W1, Oinc, Bob Quail
& not sure if this is, Durbano, Brown or McCarthy ? ... don't remember.

"July 1958, Relieving Scotland Lightship LV 87/512, on Scotland Station off Sandy Hook, NJ. Lowering the small boat, the purpose was for the weekly transfer of compensatory leave crew, mail, supplies and fresh food to / from USCG buoy tender Arbutus (W-203)."



*Small Boat from Relief 78/505,
alongside Bouy Tender, Arbutus W203
Scotland Station, July 1958,*

Mail, Supplies, Liberty Party & Water Transfer



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

"July 1958, Relieving Scotland Lightship LV 87/512, on Scotland Station off Sandy Hook, NJ . . . Small boat from the Relief LV78/505, alongside the buoy tender Arbutus (W-203). The following would be normal procedures that would occur when the buoy tender would come up astern of the lightship . . . The lightship crew would throw a heaving line over to the buoy tender, and then pull a line back, which would be used to secure the buoy tender off the stern of the lightship. The lightship crew would then throw another heaving line over to the buoy tender, and a water hose would be pulled over to the lightship. This hose would be connected to a fitting for the water tank, and then the buoy tender would pump fresh water to the lightship. Only after these tasks were accomplished, would the small boat be lowered."



AMBROSE STATION ... WINTER 1958
Lowering Small Boat, for Compensatory Leave crew transfer to Bouy Tender Arbutus W203...
L-R, Virgilio Dalomba, Rhode Island, Ray D'urbano, Rochester, N.Y.,
James F. (Jay) McCarthy, City Island, Bronx N.Y., Dave Fiterman, Fargo, No. Dakota,
Frank Baglio, Pittsburgh, PA., Bob Quail and Louis C. Carter, BMC, CT.

"Winter 1958, Relieving Ambrose lightship WAL-613, on Ambrose Channel Lightship Station, outer New York harbor. The crew posed for a picture before lowering the small boat behind them and at deck level. The purpose was for the weekly transfer of compensatory leave crew, mail, supplies, and fresh food to / from USCGC buoy tender Arbutus (W-203). Note the men with the life jackets on, were the ones manning the small boat on this trip."



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations



*WINTER, DECK VIEW LOOKING AFT
Ambrose Station, January 1959*

"Winter, January 1959, [this photo] gives a partial view of the ship's bell. I often regretted never taking a full view picture of the bell, with 'USLHS LV 78' engraved on it. While aboard, we never referred to the ship as LV 78 (USLHS designation), we always used the official U.S. Coast Guard designation, WAL 505."



*WINTER, VIEW OF SMALL BOAT AREA
Ambrose Station, January 1959*

"Winter, January 1959, [this photo] shows the small boat (motor whale boat). We had just gone through a very bad storm, followed by snow, around Christmas of '58, and the canvas cover on the boat was torn & shredded during the storm. Thus, no cover on the boat."



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations



WINTER, RADIO BEACON ROOM AREA
Ambrose Station, January 1959
Jay McCarthy, holding on

"Winter, January 1959, scenes while on Ambrose Station, [this photo] shows the snow and fairly rough seas we were still experiencing, deck view of aft deck house (radio beacon room)."



WINTER, DECK VIEW OF STERN AREA
Ambrose Station, January 1959

"Winter, January 1959, scenes while on Ambrose Station, [this photo] shows the snow and fairly rough seas we were still experiencing, deck view of stern area."



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations



*February ... 1959
C.G.C. 83464 ... approaching Relief, on
Overfalls Station, Lewes Delaware*

"February 1959, CGC 83464 approaching Relief, on Overfalls Station, Lewes, Delaware."

"Relieving Overfalls Lightship WLV 605, on Overfalls Station, off Lewes, Delaware during 1959. Overfalls was similar to Cornfield Point Lightship Station, as both were serviced by an 83-footer. Buoy tender came out only when we needed fresh water. All other tasks (liberty parties, supplies, food, and mail) were handled by the 83-footer. Overfalls Lightship Station was off Lewes, Delaware, however the 83-fotter took us into Cape May, NJ, Training Center for liberty."



*DECK VIEW OF BOW AREA
Overfalls Station, February 1959,
Jay McCarthy, making monkeys fist for heaving line*

"Deck view of bow area, Overfalls Station, February, 1959, Jay McCarthy making monkeys fist for heaving line."



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations



*C.G.C. 83464 ... pulling alongside Relief,
L-R, Boismeno, Brown, Carter & Fairfull*

"CGC 83464 pulling alongside Relief, L-R, Boismeno, Brown, Carter & Fairfull."



*C.G.C. 83464 ... pulling away from Relief,
with Compensatory Leave crew aboard.*

"CGC 83464 pulling away from Relief, with compensatory leave crew aboard."



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations



Relief viewed from deck of C.G.C. 83464

"Relief viewed from deck of CGC 83464."



*C.G.C. 83464 ... Heading into Cape May, N.J.
Relief Lightship in background.*

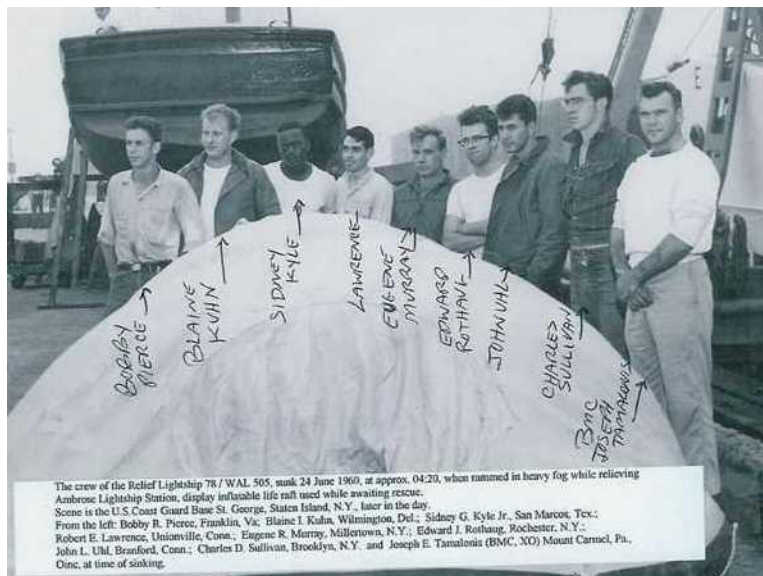
CGC 83464 heading into Cape May, NJ, Relief Lightship in background."



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This is the final photograph Jay McCarthy provided us that illustrated his career on board the LV-78 / WAL-505. He completed his tour on 23 April 1959 and then, having completed his two year active duty tour, returned to his inactive reserve status and was honorably discharged on 23 February 1963, thus fulfilling his eight-year service obligation. He went on to a 35 year career with the "old" Bell system."



The crew of the Relief Lightship 78 / WAL 505, sunk 24 June 1960, at approx. 04:20, when rammed in heavy fog while relieving Ambrose Lightship Station, display inflatable life raft used while awaiting rescue. Scene is the U.S. Coast Guard Base St. George, Staten Island, N.Y., later in the day. From the left: Bobby R. Pierce, Franklin, Va.; Blaine I. Kuhn, Wilmington, Del.; Sidney G. Kyle Jr., San Marcos, Tex.; Robert E. Lawrence, Unionville, Conn.; Eugene R. Murray, Millertown, N.Y.; Edward J. Rothaug, Rochester, N.Y.; John L. Uhl, Branford, Conn.; Charles D. Sullivan, Brooklyn, N.Y. and Joseph E. Tammosis (BMC, XX) Mount Carmel, Pa. Onsc. at time of sinking.

Although Jay McCarthy transferred off LV-78 on 23 April 1959 and so was not on board the lightship when she was rammed and sunk while on station in 1960, he did provide the following photograph of the survivors of that collision and sinking. He noted:

"On 24 June 1960, at approximately 0411, the freighter SS *Green Bay*, outbound from New York Harbor in dense fog and zero visibility, collided with the USCG Lightship RELIEF LV-78 / WAL-505 on Ambrose Channel Lightship Station (relieving Ambrose Lightship WLV-613). Relief 78/505 was rammed amidships on the starboard side, resulting in a jagged hole at least two feet wide, extending from the weather deck & narrowing downward towards the keel. The foghorn, mast light & radio beacon on the Relief 78/505 were all on & operating properly. The Relief 78/505 sank on station approximately ten minutes later. No lives were lost, as all nine crewmen abandoned ship in an inflatable life raft. The small boat was on the starboard side & could not be used. Relief 78/505 is currently sitting upright and intact in approximately 100 feet of water, one mile east of the Ambrose Channel Light Tower.

[The] . . . photo of the survivors, taken later that day at USCG Base St. George, Staten Island, NY, the home towns noted, are as of the date of 24 June 1960."



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Same photo of above, without the handwritten names. McCarthy noted:

"Pierce, Huhn and Sullivan were the only ones aboard when I left the ship on 23 April 1959. Pierce was the one on watch, heard the SS Green Bay approaching in the fog and sounded the General Alarm before the collision. . . The inflatable life raft shown in the photo was located (stored) on the top of the after deck house on the port side. See the official USCG photo of the ship [above]."