

LORAN STATION ESTACA DE VARES

1967 General Information Book

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GENERAL INFORMATION

LORAN STATION

ESTACA de VARES



**COMMANDER
COAST GUARD ACTIVITIES EUROPE
LONDON, ENGLAND**

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
U.S. COAST GUARD**



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Address reply to:

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Coast Guard
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1 July 1967

LETTER OF PROMULGATION

1. This publication was written for the general enlightenment of interested personnel and to provide relevant information for Commanding Officers and Liaison Officers or enlisted men preparing for assignment to this Loran station.
2. In addition to operational and military responsibilities particular to this station, information of a more general nature is included. Men assigned to this station must adjust to native customs and attitudes. A picture is given of the people unique to this area, the topography of the surrounding country, the prevailing climatic conditions and the available recreational facilities. Familiarization with these aspects will enable the prospective relief to prepare himself for his new surroundings.
3. This publication was compiled from information submitted by men actually engaged in active duty on the Loran station. Very few alterations have been necessary, and perhaps one of the values of this publication is to be gained through the tone and manner of expression of the author, who, in many cases, is found to be interesting, informative and imaginative. The insights offered are based on first-hand experience and should prove valuable to an American living in a foreign country.
4. It is requested that errors and omissions noted, as well as suggestions for improvement, be addressed to Commander, Coast Guard Activities, Europe, Box 50, FPO, New York, N.Y., 09510.

R. E. HAMMOND
CAPTAIN, U.S. COAST GUARD
COMMANDER, COAST GUARD ACTIVITIES, EUROPE

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Chapter I - General Information

A. Location

LTS Estaca de Vares is located on the northwest coast of Spain, where the Bay of Biscay meets the Atlantic Ocean. The station sits near the edge of a 200 foot cliff, the termination of Punta de la Estaca de Vares, northernmost point in Spain.

The real meaning of Estaca de Vares is lost in the past, but local people say that the Stake of Vares was a marker left by some Scandinavian mariner to serve as an aid to navigation. If true, the marker was replaced long ago by one of Spain's most powerful light houses, a quarter mile from the station, and our only near neighbor.

B. Climate

The climate of Estaca de Vares is uniquely bad, and a source of many jokes and stories. In general, the weather is rainy and windy, with over-cast days being the normal condition. Worse than the rain, salt spray sweeps across the point much of the time, as the open sea pounds against the cliffs.

The winters are uncomfortable, with rain and gale winds almost a daily occurrence in December, January, and February. There is occasional light snow, although the temperature rarely goes below freezing. In summer, while there are many pleasant days, the nights are cool and sudden changes in the weather make carrying a light jacket at all times advisable.

C. Environs

Estaca de Vares is in a part of Spain called Galicia. The local people call themselves Gallegoes, and are little interested in the rest of Spain. The language of Galicia is Galletan, which resembles Portuguese, but a person who speaks Spanish is able to communicate without much difficulty.

The country is heavily populated, with practically no industry except farming and fishing. The men wear wooden shoes like those associated with Holland when working in the fields. The wooden shoes for women are gracefully made, with pegs underneath and attractive designs carved on the toe. At important fiestas the gaita, a kind of bagpipe developed by the shepherds of Galicia a thousand years ago, is played.

Galicia is called the Ireland of Spain, for it is that green. It is the most backward part of the country, the least visited, and probably the most beautiful.

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The nearest U. S. military establishment is the Navy Fuel Annex at El Ferrol, approximately one and a half hours drive to the southwest, now closed and in a caretaker status. The caretaker is a retired Navy CPO, the only other American in this area.

El Ferrol is the birthplace of Franco, the site of Spain's largest naval base, and the nearest railway station. The train goes to Madrid, an overnight trip, is narrow gauge, noisy, and slow.

La Coruna, with a population of perhaps one hundred thousand, is one and a half hours southwest of El Ferrol. The nearest air terminal is at La Coruna. During the summer there are daily flights from Madrid to La Coruna and back, but in winter these flights are scheduled only two or three times a week and are often cancelled because of weather.

In the vicinity of the station, there are only small, primitive villages. Twelve miles away is the small town of Vivero, where the station purchases certain local items and services, and the men get haircuts.

Puerto del Barquero is a village five miles from the station where mail of Spanish address is dispatched and picked up daily. The Spanish address is used for all private correspondence, as international air mail to the U. S. takes less than a week, whereas APO mail usually requires a month or more.

The reference to La Coruna in the Spanish address is somewhat misleading, as Puerto del Barquero is in the province of La Coruna. The city by that name is nearly ninety miles away, over rough and twisting roads, and does little to relieve the isolated character of our station.

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Chapter II - Operations

A. Aids to Navigation

Loran-A only.

B. Communications

R-840/URR receiver, AN/URT-17A transmitter, single sideband. Primary frequency 3627KC, net controlled by NCI, Naples, Italy. CW communication with EBB, Spanish Navy at El Ferrol, on 2600 KC and 5006 KC. Communications are generally good, with moderate to high atmospheric noise levels.

C. Other Coast Guard Functions

None

D. Vehicles and Boats

The station vehicle allowance is one carryall and one three-ton stake truck. The station boat, a 16 foot plastic outboard with forty horsepower motor, is used for recreation on weekends, May through September weather permitting.

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Chapter III- Personnel

A. Assignment and Rotation

LTS Estaca de Vares is a restricted station. Personnel are assigned for one year, and earn compensatory absence at the usual rate of two and a half days per month. Rotation requests, with regard to choice of districts, have been granted as closely as possible in the past.

B. Compensatory Absence

During assignment at Estaca de Vares, personnel are not granted regular liberty or annual leave, except in cases which qualify for emergency leave. Compensatory absence is earned from the date of reporting until the date of detachment, and normally is taken upon rotation to the CONUS. The Commanding Officer may recommend up to fifteen days of compensatory absence to be taken during the tour of duty, either in the CONUS or in authorized European countries, if he feels that such would improve the efficiency of his unit. The granting of such compensatory absence is the prerogative of Commander, Mediterranean Section.

C. Emergency Leave

Emergency leave may be granted when the criteria specified in Article 7-A-4, CG Personnel Manual, are met. Persons ordered to duty at Estaca de Vares should explain to their families that verification by the Red Cross is necessary before emergency leave can be granted. Time will be saved if the verification is sent directly to the American Red Cross, Naples, Italy.

D. Medical

There is no corpsman at Estaca de Vares. The nearest doctor is a Spanish surgeon in Vivero, who also practices general medicine. His standards of cleanliness and methods of treatment are somewhat different from our own, and any serious case is sent to Torrejon Air Base, near Madrid. This can be a problem if the patient is not fit for the three hour ride over rough roads to La Coruna, plus the two hour flight to Madrid. It is of particular concern in the winter, when the airplane is often grounded for days. The doctor has effectively treated the crew for minor ailments in the past, and could be very valuable in an emergency, however.

The most immediate threat to health at Estaca is hepatitis. Because the land is heavily farmed and the fertilizer is night soil, the disease tends toward epidemics in the summer and early fall. The station has had two cases in the past year, despite constant reminder, good sanitation, and strict supervision of food preparation. Eating off station, except in La Coruna or in local restaurants known to be of good quality, is discouraged.

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E. Training and Education

A vigorous training program is being carried out at this station. With a minimum crew, it is necessary for every man to be able to cover all but the most technical functions. For example, every man knows how to change generators, man the radio, administer first aid, handle small arms, and operate the OBA. Each man is required to conduct a seminar on every aspect of operations and safety during his tour at Estaca. Each member of the crew is working on an Institute course, and the Spanish lessons given each day are well attended.

F. Morale

Morale is good. The present crew is considered exceptional, and the problems of maintenance are enough to keep everyone busy. The local people, although uneducated and poor, do everything possible to show their admiration for Americans and to develop friendships. The personal challenge to learn their language and their customs helps to keep off duty hours from dragging.

G. Recreation

Besides the usual games of volleyball, pool, table tennis, arts and crafts, and record playing, there is fairly good TV reception for three hours each day. Many U. S. programs are televised, with Spanish words dubbed in, and at certain times during the tourist season, bull fights are transmitted live from Madrid. There is water skiing on a nearby river when the weather permits.

The fishing here is said to be excellent, with trout in most rivers and salmon in a few. The season lasts from February until September. Bird hunting is good in the fall, although with other diversions and little free time, station personnel have rarely engaged in hunting and fishing in the past. There are many beautiful beaches near the station, usually deserted because few tourists come this way and the local people spend most of their time working in the fields. Although there are no skin divers presently at the station, the clear water and sandy bottom would seem to encourage the sport.

Each village has a fiesta in honor of its patron saint each year. These are orderly affairs, more like old fashioned picnics than the Hollywood version. There are games for the children, who learn to dance as soon as they can walk, and the Guardia Civil is always present to make sure that everyone has a good time. When a representation from the station attends, the Americanos are usually the center of attraction, and usually manage to add something to the good, clean fun.

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A form of recreation which is rarely utilized by the present crew is overnight trips to El Ferrol or La Coruna, in conjunction with logistics trips or other station business. La Coruna is a favorite tourist attraction, but for some reason has never been popular with the crew.

In this regard, there are two myths that should be debunked, at least where Galicia is concerned. First, things are not necessarily cheap in Spain. Personnel at Estaca have found few bargains. If the price is low, the quality probably is also. Clothing and other manufactured goods are in general more expensive than in the States, poorly made, and of limited selection. Shopping, then, is not a form of recreation at Estaca de Vares. The "Spanish boots of Spanish leather" celebrated in folk songs are likely to resemble combat boots with thick wooden soles.

The second myth is that of gypsy dancers, castanets, and urgent guitars. The don't exist in Galicia except for Xavier Ougat records imported from the U. S. The music of Galicia is more likely to be the Beatles in Spanish, or just plain rock and roll. The shops stock castinets for the tourist trade during the summer, but no one here knows how they work .

The Gallego is a much less effusive individual. He wears a beret and wooden shoes, has a great number of superstitions, and requires his daughter to be home at an early hour. Everything is done in either community or at least, family force. There is little opportunity for courtship of a temporary kind.

The early disappointment a man feels upon arrival, when his dreams of the gypsy life are dashed, gives way to interest in other, more realistic aspects of Spanish life. Photography becomes an important diversion for most, and the station has a well equipped dark room for those who prefer to roll their own.

One type of fishing which may be unique in the whole Coast Guard is practiced by one of our three Spanish employees. It is called whistle fishing. The equipment is simple, consisting of a large cane pole, some snails for bait, and the ability to whistle a catchy Spanish tune. Felix, the originator of the method, descends to the rocks at the bottom of the cliff when the signs are propitious, drops a snail into the water near the edge of a boulder, whistles a few bars, then draws out a fish. All attempts by the crew to imitate his method have ended in frustration. Felix says the failure is due to poor fidelity in the whistle, rather than improper rig.

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Chapter IV - Engineering

A. Electronics

LTS Estaca de Vares is in standby status, conducting only monthly and quarterly tests, and maintaining operational readiness. The two ET's assigned are adequate for the present mission.

B. Generating Plant

The generating plant consists of three, 100 KW, AC generators, driven by GM 6-71 diesel engines.

C. Antenna Tower

The antenna tower is one hundred twenty feet high, of triangular cross section, guyed construction.

D. Fuel and Water

Fuel oil is received from the Spanish agency, CAMPSA, through inter-service agreement, and stored in three, ten thousand gallon tanks. Gasoline is purchased from local service stations with CAMPSA coupons.

Water is taken partly from a surface well on the station grounds and partly from a small stream flowing through the station. The bacteria count is within acceptable limits, and with batch chlorination there have been no health problems attributable to water in the past. Massive amounts of rust are present at the faucets, which seems to be caused by a combination of factors beyond the control of station personnel. This is a nuisance more than a real problem.

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Chapter V - Comptroller

A. Commissary

Commissary stores are procured at Torrejon Air Base once each month, flown to La Coruna by Coast Guard aircraft, and then hauled from there by station truck. The only food item purchased locally is eggs. The station refrigeration facilities, two walk-in freezers and a cool room, are adequate for the number of personnel attached.

B. Pay

Pay checks are mailed from the Section Office every two weeks, to the APO address, and arrive more or less in that order. A bank in El Ferrol will cash the checks for either U. S. currency or pesetas, or a combination of both. Transmitting funds out of Spain is difficult, as money orders leaving the country must be approved in Madrid. Most of the men assigned to Estaca de Vares have checking accounts at banks in the States, and prefer to mail checks directly home for deposit, cashing one occasionally in pesetas for local expenses.

C. Clothing

All men arriving at Estaca are expected to have full seabags, as personnel inspection is held weekly, and seabag inspection is held each quarter. When restricted liberty is granted, or men go ashore on business, civilian clothing must be worn. Such clothing must be of acceptable U. S. standards, avoiding extremes of style or color. As a guideline, choose clothing similar to that worn in the northern U. S. in the early spring, with a good raincoat at the head of the list. The addition of special items for hunting, fishing, hiking or other sports, will make the tour of duty more enjoyable.

D. Transportation

Transportation is mostly by station vehicle. On rare occasions, such as a weekend trip to La Coruna, a crew member might ride the bus, although service is slow and personnel are seldom away from the station long enough to use it. More about personal transportation in Chapter VII.

E. Supply

Supply is through the normal service channels, with the exception of a few small items purchased locally. As might be expected under the circumstances, supply service is slow. It is not unusual for six months to pass between the date of order and the date of receipt, and many shipments lie at the steamship terminal in La Coruna for a month or more before the station is notified. By the time one commanding officer and crew become familiar with the system, they are due to rotate.

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F. Imprest fund

Class A (Limited), maintained in accordance with COMCOGACTEUR Instruction 7250.1. Local purchases are made in pesetas, at the current rate of 59.73 per dollar.

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Chapter VI - Administration

A. General

LTS Estaca de Vares is in standby status. The personnel allowance of 1 LTJG/ENS, 1 ET1, 2 ET2, 1 ET3, 1 RM2, 2 RM3, 1 CS2, 1 EN1, 1 EN3, 2 SN and 1 FN is adequate for the mission. In addition to the military personnel assigned, the station employs three Spanish nationals. Two of these civil workers assist with maintenance of buildings and grounds, and the third serves as mess cook.

Once each month, two men go to Torrejon Air Base to fill the commissary order and personal orders for Exchange items, meeting the aircraft from Naples to load the supplies on board and return with it to La Coruna. Travel order numbers are requested from the Section Office for this purpose, and travel orders are written by the station command. Service Records are maintained by the station, personnel diary entries are made by the Section Office.

B. Paperwork

Estaca has the usual paperwork encountered throughout the Coast Guard in its class of station, plus many Air Force forms necessary for that liaison and support. In addition, many letters are received from Spanish agencies regarding freight shipments, local services, and liaison with the Spanish Navy. Translating these letters and taking the required action is always an interesting business, but the total amount of paperwork at this station does not constitute any kind of burden.

C. Discipline

Discipline is good at Estaca. The crew is conscientious and mature, and little is needed in the way of admonition or restraint. The Engineman Chief present in the EN1 billet is designated as Officer in Charge in the absence of the Commanding Officer, with certain powers of NJP. One of the subjects of instruction at Quarters is Article 15, UCMJ, but this is more for enlightenment than suppression.

D. Safety

This subject receives special emphasis at Estaca. Besides the usual hazards of fire, electrical shock, and falls, there are unusual hazards in driving in this area. The road safety record of this station has been poor in the past, and the present command is determined to improve it. Only the four leading petty officers are allowed to drive at present, and the use of vehicles is limited to actual need for business or approved recreation, during daylight hours. A low maximum speed has been established, and safety seminars are held each month.

E. Relations with Local Military Commands and Civil Officials

Relations with local military commands are limited to liaison and logistics functions with the U. S. Air Force at Torrejon, and communications with the Spanish Navy at El Ferrol. The Air Force has cooperated in every way possible in the past, actually doing more for the station in the past than has been required by any inter-service agreement. Liaison with the Spanish Navy is made through La Grana, the military radio station at El Ferrol. The present commander, Capitan de Fragata Carlos Martin, makes informal visits to Estaca now and then, and is always very cordial in his attitude.

The most important civil agency here is the Guardia Civil. The tradition of friendship and cooperation between members of the Guardia and station personnel will be maintained. Other important civil officials, including the town police in Vivero, are visited by the Commanding Officer periodically to maintain personal relations. In summary, it can be said that relations between the Coast Guard and local military and civil agencies in this area are good, and are easy to maintain with conduct of normal Coast Guard standards.

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Chapter VII - Words of Wisdom for Reliefs

A. General

The first thing a new man should appreciate is the difficulty of travel in Spain. Although the country is only six hundred miles square, roughly speaking, the difficulty in passing from one border to the other is often greater than going from one coast of the United States to the other.

Secondly, Estaca de Vares is not Estartit. One is in the vicinity of Barcelona, on the east coast, and the other is near La Coruna, on the northwest coast. In spite of efforts to educate everyone concerned to this distinction, men assigned to Estaca continue to go to Estartit. The inconvenience and expense which grow out of this error is discouraging.

Don't go to Estartit. Go northwest. Insist upon it.

B. Advance preparations

The check-off sheet used by Base St. George is adequate with respect to immunizations, passport, and other standard processing features, and will not be commented on here.

The most important advance preparation a man can make in coming to Estaca is to learn some Spanish. This is particularly true of Commanding Officers since they will be required to conduct much of the station's business in the language, but in certain respects it is true of every member of the crew. There is little understanding without communication, and it has been noted that the tour of duty at Estaca de Vares will be enjoyed to the extent that the Spanish language is understood.

Certain other advance preparations which will smooth the way to Estaca are:

(1) Write to the station for information to fit your personal case. Use the following address to save time:

Commanding Officer
LTS Estaca de Vares
Lista de Correos (La Coruna)
Puerto del Barquero
Espana

(2) Study Spanish, if only a few words. A workbook of the "Made Simple" type or its equal, is easy to study and very effective.

(3) Change \$20 into pesetas. This can be done at almost any bank. Ask for both paper and metal money, then spend some time becoming familiar with the system. Remember that a 50 peseta piece, which looks like our half

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dollar, is actually worth almost a dollar. This practice will help you to buy more wisely, and the money will be needed when you arrive in Spain.

C. What to Bring

This subject is limited, since most men reporting to Estaca come by air. Civilian clothing is a must. The uniform is not worn off station in Spain, and if a man is to leave the station for any reason he must dress in good taste. The choice of clothing is left to the individual as a personal matter. It is important to understand that Estaca is not in sunny Spain. Bring warm clothing, with emphasis on sweaters, sport coats, car coats, and other casual wear. The Spanish prefer dark colors, it may be added. Bring a good raincoat.

It is best not to rely on the local market for clothing of any kind. Quality is generally poor, and prices are higher than in the States. Custom suits may be a bargain, as the material usually runs around \$40 if purchased at the Exchange in Torrejon, and tailoring costs about \$20. The style is quite different from that worn in the U. S., however, and most men would not care to wear the same suit once they return to the States. Any custom-made clothing should be approached with caution, with regard to both cost and workmanship.

Other items which should be brought in reasonable quantity are toilet articles, tobacco, and air weight stationery. Madrid runs are made only once each month, and such items are not available this side of Torrejon.

D. Directions Enroute

Upon arrival at Madrid airport, take a taxi to Torrejon Air Base. The cost will be about 150 pesetas, which is reimburseable. Go to the MATS air terminal and ask for the Navy ATCO representative, who will arrange accommodations for your stay of two or three days.

While processing and awaiting transportation to Estaca, be sure to attend the driver's school and apply for a Spanish driver's license. In order to drive a government vehicle in Spain, you must hold both a valid U. S. Government Motor Vehicle Operators Identification Card and a valid International Driver's License or a Spanish Driver's license.

When the mode of transportation is known, ask ATCO to telephone or send a message to Estaca de Vares stating place, mode, and time of arrival. Read your orders carefully, and examine the travel warrant you will be given, to make sure that you are going to Estaca and not Estartit.

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(1) Travel by Air

If your travel is by airplane, you will land at La Coruna. If the station has been notified, a vehicle will be there to meet you. In the absence of someone from the station, take a taxi to the Hotel Riazor in La Coruna. The cost of the taxi will be about 100 pesetas.

The desk clerk at the Riazor speaks some English, and is familiar with the situation. Ask her to call the station (Vivero 400) for you. If you are unable to get through, take a room for the night, and keep trying. The cost of the room will be about 250 pesetas, and the dining room downstairs serves safe food at reasonable prices.

If the desk clerk is still not able to reach the station by telephone the next day, ask her to help you arrange transportation by bus to the town of El Barquero, get off there, and wait for the station vehicle which comes every day at 1830 to pick up international mail. The vehicle is a gray International Scout. It will help to show the words "El Barquero" to the conductor when you get on the bus, so he will know where you want to get off. The ride lasts about four hours.

(2) Travel by Train

If the travel from Torrejon to Estaca is to be made by train, ask ARCO to telephone the Navy Fuel Annex at El Ferrol. (The caretaker is Mr. Hardy) Make sure he does this immediately, as a telephone call in Spain often takes more time than the actual trip.

El Ferrol is the last stop. Make sure you get on the right car of the train at Torrejon, as cars are removed from the train at various places along the way. Upon arrival at El Ferrol, wait for the CG vehicle at least one hour.

If no vehicle arrives, call Mr. Hardy at the USNFA. The number is 2298 ("Dos, Dos, Nueve, Ocho"). The USNFA is part of the Spanish Navla Base of La Grana, in El Ferrol. If Mr. Hardy is not there, try his home, 3973 ("Tres, Nueve, Siete, Tres").

If all attempts to call Mr. Hardy fail, take a taxi to the bus depot ("Autobus" or "Coche Linea"), get on the bus marked Vivero, and ride for about two hours until you come to El Barquero. Get off there and wait for the station vehicle at 1830.

If you miss the bus and you can't get in touch with Mr. Hardy, take a taxi to the Hotel Parador in El Ferrol. The cost will be about 50 pesetas for the night, and the food is safe to eat. Next morning, try the USNFA again or take the bus to El Barquero.

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III. Helpful (and Healthful) Hints

Prior to leaving Torrejon Air base, make sure you have at least 600 pesetas in Spanish currency. American money will not be accepted in many places, and the rate of exchange is not always in your favor.

Meals are available on the train, at a cost of approximately 130 to 150 pesetas. The food is safe and reasonable filling.

The bathroom is called "servicio" - (SER VEETH EE O).

If meals are taken in small towns, and this includes El Ferrol, stick to beef steak and fried potatoes. Beef steak is pronounced about the same way in Spanish, and potatoes are called patatas.

Specifically forbidden are:

- (1) Milk and all milk products
- (2) Shell fish not thoroughly cooked
- (3) Raw vegetables, such as fresh salads
- (4) Green berries or other fresh fruit grown close to the ground and served uncooked. If apples and other such fruit is eaten, be sure you peel it yourself.
- (5) Water, except the bottled kind. Ask for agua minerale or gaseosa. Agua minerale is slightly on the bitter side, but palatable. The gaseosa tastes like 7-up.

None of the foregoing is intended to frighten or discourage. With simple precautions, which become second nature after a short time, protection of personal health presents no great problem.

IN SUMMARY

The first concern of everyone at Estaca de Vares is the accomplishment of our mission and the maintenance of good relations with the people of Spain. After this should come some enjoyment of the country for each man assigned. Given the right attitude, there is no reason why Estaca de Vares cannot be one of the best loran tours in the Coast Guard.

