

Chapter Eleven

NE NAVIGATION FACILITY (LORAN STATION), ESTARTIT, SPAIN

April 1961 to April 1962

On 5 April 1961 I reported in at McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey for transportation to Naples, Italy. I was scheduled for a commercial flight to Paris the next morning, but was informed that a flight for Frankfurt, Germany was available that afternoon. I took it, and rode an uncomfortable MATS (Air Force) flight to Frankfurt, with fueling stops at Gander, Newfoundland and at Lajes AFB in the Azores. The aircraft was the military version of the DC-4, I think – a four piston-engine propeller aircraft. I spent a night in a military BOQ in Frankfurt, and the next day took a Lufthansa commercial flight to Milan, Italy and then Alitalia flights to Naples via Rome. I arrived in Naples and reported in at the U.S. Coast Guard Mediterranean Section Office on 7 April. I stayed in a small hotel across the street from the section office, and remained in Naples for 9 days. Mostly, I read volumes of files about the various negotiations with French and Spanish governments to establish a LORAN C station site on the northeast Mediterranean coast, about selection of the Estartit site after failure to find a location further north in France, and about various agreements and contracts to get the station built. I was briefed by MEDSEC staff people and learned that construction was underway but not nearly completed. However, I was told that our goal was to be “on air” by 1 July if humanly possible.

In off-hours I saw a little of Naples, and was able to visit the ruins at Pompeii, where an Italian village had been completely buried by a volcanic eruption. My recollections of Naples are vague, but I do remember not being impressed with Italian food. In fact, there did not seem to be a T-bone steak in all of Naples!

The MEDSEC office was a bustling place with people coming and going on TAD

o other LORAN stations – Libya, Southern Italy, Turkey, LORAN C monitor stations on Sardinia and Rhodes, Greece; and a new LORAN A station in the northwest corner of Spain. Under section command, stationed there in Naples, was an air detachment of Coast Guard aviation personnel who operated C-123 cargo aircraft in support of the LORAN stations. The section was commanded by CAPT F.J. Statts, and second in command was CDR Helmer “Snapper” Pearson. Pearson retired at the rank of rear admiral in 1974. The section’s civil engineer was LT Byron Jordan (Academy ‘51), a very busy but competent fellow who told me a lot about the station site and its construction. He also inquired if I intended to bring my wife over, and offered that there was affordable housing in the village. I observed that my orders didn’t provide for dependent travel to Spain. He explained that travel would be our own expense, but went on to say there was an exchange of messages between MEDSEC and Headquarters discussing dependents on site in Spain. MEDSEC stated rumor had it the prospective COs for Estarrit (me) and another station at Estaca de Vares (northwestern Spain) intended to bring wives to the sites, and asked for advice. Headquarters response was that the Coast Guard was not authorized to regulate the travel of civilian dependents abroad. Jordan interpreted this to mean that the decision was mine, but advised that it was a sensitive subject with the MEDSEC command, and probably best just not discussed with the CO. I followed his advice.

On 16 April, CDR Pearson and I proceeded to Madrid, Spain via commercial air. We were met at the Madrid international airport by a U.S. Navy LCDR who escorted us to our hotel, provided us with some Spanish currency (a loan from his office), and gave us some advice on places to dine that evening. He let us know he’d pick us up in the morning and escort us to the offices of the Commander, Joint U.S. Military Group Spain (CHJUSMG). That evening CDR Pearson and I dined at an internationally famous restaurant in the old part of Madrid. Located below ground in carved-out stone caves, El Botin was indeed a new experience for a young fellow from Washington state! Our Navy “guide” had suggested we try an appetizer called “angulas”, but declined to tell us what it

was, and suggested we share a roast suckling pig as our main course. As an alternative, he suggested rack of lamb. The restaurant itself was an experience. It was composed of a series of underground rooms hewn from stone, with two or three stairways leading down from street level. Most of the cooking was done in a huge clay and stone oven centered in the largest room, with a big firebox fed with charcoal and dried olive pits for fuel. The huge oven had doors at opposite ends, and cooks loaded the oven with cooking vessels slid in and out on long wooden paddles. The further the vessels were shoved in, the hotter the oven. This restaurant had been in continuous operation since the 1700s, so the story went, except for a few years during the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s. Young fellows with guitars and other stringed instruments wandered through the restaurant singing and playing for the customers. I was indeed intrigued! CDR Pearson and I took a chance and ordered the angulas, but I believe passed on the whole roasted suckling pig in favor of the lamb. When the angulas were brought by our waiter they were served in blistering hot crockery dishes, crackling a little in olive oil, and emitting the pungent odor of fresh roasted garlic. In El Botin's dim light, they looked like dishes of white spaghetti. On first bite, I was hooked – they were delicious – and when I discovered that they were actually roasted baby eels, it no longer mattered! I ate them as often as I could find them while in Spain.

The next day our escort picked us up at our hotel, and took us to the Joint U.S. Military Group offices. Among other stops, I was ushered in and introduced the JUSMG commander, LT General Caldera was his name. He was an impressive gentleman who told me I was going to be one of only two U.S. base commanders in Spain who would not have a co-located Spanish military command on site. He promised full support of our mission, and told us our logistical support would be provided by Zaragoza Air Force Base located in central Spain. He cautioned me to maintain good relationships with local citizens, and said to contact him if any problems occurred.

While CDR Pearson met with other people, I was sent to the U.S. Embassy there

in Madrid, and met with the naval attaché, a Navy captain, and his assistant, a Marine Corps major. A few minutes into their briefing, I began to understand that the naval attaché was an intelligence officer. In later years, I wondered what rock I'd been living under! These two officers conducted what was basically a political briefing. They advised me that the Catalan people in northeast Spain had not supported Franco in the Spanish Civil War, and that there were still lingering resentments more than 20 years later (incidentally, I did not find this to be true. While some Catalans thought their region should be independent of Spain for economic reasons, they generally thought Franco was a leader who meant the very best for the Spanish people). The attaché warned me of communist activity, and asked me to report any I heard of or otherwise encountered. (If I ever met a Spanish communist, I sure didn't know it!) Finally they spoke of intelligence aircraft overflights from time to time, and said I would likely be visited by intelligence agents once in a while. (I never knowingly saw a flight, and was never visited!).

CDR Pearson and I left Madrid by train and traveled to Zaragoza in central Spain. We left before dinner time on an ornate old train that seemed to run on square wheels. Each of us had a small stateroom, and we had a fine meal in the train's dining car. Sleep that night was elusive, but I was finally awakened by a porter at about 0630 to find our sleeper car resting quietly on a track at Zaragoza's train station. We had apparently arrived a few hours earlier. CDR Pearson and I were met by an Air Force officer and taken to nearby Zaragoza Air Force Base. After breakfast, we met with the deputy commander and members of his staff. I learned that this base would provide commissary (foodstuffs) and other supplies to my station, and some limited medical support in emergencies. We spent half a day being briefed on procedures, how I was to order supplies etc. Basically, my station would receive supplies on routine deliveries of supplies to a small Air Force tactical early-warning radar site located near Rosas, Spain – about 40 kilometers from Estarrit.

The next day, Pearson and I went on to Barcelona and then on to Estarrit. As I

remember it, we arrived around April 20th. There was a U.S. Navy lieutenant on site, a BuDOCKS (Bureau of Navy Yards and Docks) civil engineer who was administrator of the contract for construction of the station. His name was Bud Weiss, and he was a very pleasant and helpful fellow. A Coast Guard civil engineer was also there, LT Gerald O. Lesperance (Academy class '52). Jerry was on TAD from the civil engineering branch of the 3rd Coast Guard District in New York. We were also met in Estartit by an official from the firm Brown-Raymond-Walsh (BRW), a huge conglomerate that built all the U.S. bases in Spain during the late '50s and early '60s. In the next day or two, I visited the site and met the onsite contract supervisor and his crew of eight or nine American foremen. The supervisor was an Irish-American named Mike. One of his foremen was an Italian-American from New Jersey named Jim Santelli. The night before CDR Pearson returned to Naples, we were taken to dinner at a local restaurant by the BRW official. It was an interesting dinner. The fellow had more to drink than he probably should have, and told us that our station contract had been negotiated at a loss on purpose because his firm, with a cost-plus DOD contract, was simply making too much money! But he went on to say the while the GAO was about to do its annual review, he wasn't worried. They were giving all their U.S. employees a huge annual bonus, to help reduce profit. And he went on to slyly hint that LBJ (vice president Lyndon Johnson) would "fix" any other problems they might encounter with GAO, since he and his family had financial interests in the consortium. I never learned if any of this was true.

When CDR Pearson left, I surely felt like the "lone ranger" even though Jerry Lesperance was there. His title was "construction liaison officer" and I was the designated prospective commanding officer. But I had no station yet, and no people assigned. On the station site above the village, there was a small temporary office building occupied by the BRW people, a large Quonset warehouse, and one building that was completed far enough to have a roof on it. Perhaps 200 Spanish laborers were on site doing all kinds of work – digging foundations, pouring concrete, quarrying rock for walls, etc. There was another contractor on site as well. An American supervisor (first name Sam) had a crew

of about 10 Italians, and they were in the early stages of erecting the station's transmitting tower antenna. This tower eventually was 625 feet tall, a tripod girder structure guyed at various levels. The station site was on a bluff above the village, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea to the east. An expanse of beach perhaps 10 miles long extended to the south. Even in summer, the beautiful beach was mostly deserted except for a short stretch directly adjacent to the village itself. A shallow cove abutted the village, with a small rocky island at the northern edge of the cove. Onsite, the vegetation consisted mostly of a low-lying bush that I remember as some sort of sage.

The Americans working for BRW stayed in a resort hotel named "El Catalan" that nestled on the hillside above Estartit. Jerry and I were billeted there as well. The resort usually closed in winter and reopened in May, but had been kept open with a small staff to accommodate the people associated with building the LORAN station. El Catalan was crude and simple by today's "resort" standards, but in the early '60s it was one of the nicer tourist complexes along the Coast Brava of northeastern Spain. It was, I think, owned by a British company and run by a fellow of Russian extraction. The assistant manager was a delightful little fellow named "Pepe", a local man. Food in the hotel's restaurant was quite good, and the dining room itself overlooked the Mediterranean and was abutted by an outdoor stage, dance floor and night club. It became a lively place by early summer, featuring flamenco dancers and a live orchestra. My brief stay there was pleasant enough.

The village of Estartit was small, quaint and fairly attractive. There were basically two streets, parallel to the beach, a lovely expanse actually several miles long. There were a few shops and restaurants, one grocery store and several small hotels. South of the village was another hotel, slightly larger, situated on beachfront property. Population was about 600, as best as I can recall, but swelled to over 2000 in the summer months as tourists, predominantly British, swarmed into the village and filled the hotels and hostels. A local entrepreneur whom I remember only as "Eugenio", whose parents owned the village's only

grocery store, booked in groups of English tourists for one and two week vacations. He reserved blocks of hotel space, made meal arrangements, and bussed the tourists down from Perpignon, France into which they flew or rode the train. In later years, I heard he became a millionaire. During my year in Estartit I found him to be a helpful and honest person, one of the few in the village that spoke English. He helped me find hotel space for my crew when they began to arrive in late spring.

The LORAN station site was less than a mile from the village as the crow flies, but rather steep cliffs abutted the plain on which the station was being built. Our access road skirted the village to the south, then wound up the hillside and through a sizable farm and cattle ranch that abutted the station on the south. It was perhaps 1-1/2 or two miles by road. When I arrived, the only building nearing completion was the transmitting equipment building, on the east side of the station, with the 625' tower being erected directly outside the building. The largest structure, called the signal-power building, was well underway with some concrete block walls under construction. This building would house the LORAN C timing equipment, radio communications gear, a garage and shop, three large Caterpillar electrical generators, a garage and maintenance shop, an electronics shop, and most of our expendables storage and spare parts. Diesel fuel and water storage tanks were to be installed behind this building. The other major building, just barely started, would house the station's kitchen and food storage equipment, a recreation and dining hall, laundry facility, and crews quarters – a series of double rooms and a separate area for the chief petty officers. In all, about 25 men were to be assigned to the station. A fourth building was to be the commanding officer and executive officer quarters, and would contain two bedrooms, a living room with kitchenette facilities and an office for the commanding officer. As it turned out, Estartit was not assigned a chief warrant officer as executive officer, at least not in the first or second crew rotations. I never really determined why, as all other LORAN C stations all over the globe had a commissioned warrant as exec. I heard rumors that there was some sort of "turf battle" between the USCG Office of Personnel and Office of Engineering

over the issue, and ESTARTIT was the test case. But since it was a new station under construction, assignment of a CWO (electronics) would have made good sense. So I eventually occupied this building by myself.

My first two or three weeks were pretty fairly uneventful and not too arduous. There really wasn't a lot for me to do but observe construction and familiarize myself with the area. The BRW supervisor, Mike, assigned me a car and a driver, a pleasant Spanish fellow who spoke no English and drove like a Tokyo taxi driver! I traveled to the Air Force site at Rosas, about 45 kilometers to the north, and met the commanding officer, a most pleasant and helpful lieutenant colonel. I learned they had a nice exchange, with some groceries, and a fine stock of liquor that sold for astonishingly low prices. I recall liter bottles of Canadian Club whisky were somewhere around \$2.50. Dutch gin was perhaps \$1.50, for example. No U.S. taxes, no Spanish import duties. I had decided a car of my own would be useful and I approached the lieutenant colonel about it. He said I could order a new Volkswagen through his exchange for about \$950 delivered - or he had a 1960 VW "bug" he'd sell me for \$800. I accepted. He called his admin sergeant in and told him to order a new VW for himself! A few days later I picked up his '60 model for myself. In the weeks following, I had time to meander around the local countryside. I found a Roman ruins on the coast south of Rosas, with a small museum. The ruins had been "found" in the '30s, the curator told me, and then he took me on a tour of the site. He told me that the first Roman detail there was headed up by Julius Caesar's nephew, and that there were perhaps a dozen Romans on the site supervising several thousand Greeks who were engaged in agriculture and trading. It was an impressive site. The remains of the villa, a huge building, had fine terrazzo floors, tall granite pillars, running water inside from cisterns and so on. The museum displayed artifacts such as tiny glass medicine vials, wire safety pins and other items I wouldn't have guessed would have been available over 2000 years ago. Primary export crop was apparently olives, as the surrounding hillsides - now mostly barren - were terraced and had evidence of being tree-covered many years past. The Greek village ruins, below the villa, had irrigation-type ditch networks used

for sewerage and household wastes, and had a water distribution system of tile waterways. Impressive, for a society that existed before the birth of Christ.

That part of northern Spain was full of interesting places. Several impressive castles were nearby, the closest about 10 kilometers from Estartit. This imposing structure sat atop a hill overlooking a sizable village, larger than Estartit, whose name I just can't remember any more. Discussions with local folk led me to understand that the castle was never really occupied by anyone. It had been built in medieval times by the local lord for protection, and if an invasion or attack was imminent, the lord and villagers took their weapons, food and water to the castle to defend themselves. Another smaller castle south of Rosas was occupied by a detachment of Guardia Civil troops, Franco's federal police force. I visited most of the local villages and towns – Figueras, La Bisbal, Palafrugell and the largest, Gerona (population perhaps 50,000). I remember one small village I'd pass through enroute the Air Force station that seemed to raise nothing but onions. The town smelled of onions, and dried onion husks always seemed to be blowing down the village's main street. In these travels I used my own little VW. The driver assigned to me by BRW was a nice fellow, but his driving terrified me. Once, returning from Rosas and going down a winding mountain road, I made him stop and let me drive. He was humiliated, I think – but I didn't want to die young! I got Mike to reassign the fellow to other duties, take back the sedan he had provided me, and give me a little Ford pickup for me to use for official local travel. I'd take the black Chevy sedan when I needed to travel to Barcelona, because it seemed prestigious to the local folk and expected of me. In Estartit, even though I was always in civilian work clothes, the local folk always greeted me as "commandante", doffing their hats in deference, and sometimes stepping off the sidewalk to let me pass. I wasn't very comfortable with that! At age 27, I hardly felt like a "commandante".

I made several trips to Barcelona early in my tour to establish liaison with the U.S. Navy Support Facility located there. Headed up by a Navy commander, this facility provided logistics support for visiting U.S. Navy ships, and for handling of

cargo and supplies headed to and from U.S. facilities in eastern and central Spain. The detachment was commanded by a pleasant fellow named Commander R.H. Bentley, USN supply corps. CDR Bentley also arranged a meeting with the Spanish Navy Sector Commander, an admiral, who later was helpful in arranging temporary electronic monitoring sites for me.

My communications with Naples were difficult at best. Mail worked OK, although slow. Telephone service was possible, but difficult. I would have to go to the Estartit switchboard, run by an old one-armed Spanish civil war veteran. If I tried to call from another phone, through his switchboard, he always claimed he couldn't understand me. When I'd enter his office with the Naples number written down, he'd smile and dial through for me. Later on, he and I became more friendly – and his difficulties in understanding my admittedly bad Spanish seemed to vanish! Once in a while the Navy people in Barcelona would call me and read me a message from MEDSEC. Mail came via the contractor's office, such as it was. But I received little mail. LORAN Station Estartit was not officially a Coast Guard unit, and therefore was on no official distribution list. Later on, I was able to write to LCDR Don Chapman, who was stationed then in Headquarters, and asked if he could help get me into the "official mail" pipeline. He was able to get SOME things started, such as routine distribution of "Commandant Instructions" and "Notices," etc.

In early May the 625' tower was basically completed, and Sam and his crew of tower monkeys packed up and headed off to another job in Libya or Saudi Arabia or some other Middle East locale. LT Byron Jordan paid one of his several visits checking on contract progress, and inspected the tower. He found some deficiencies in the paint touchup (the tower was painted white and international orange), and some missing lock nuts etc. He advised LT Jerry Lesperance to get the crew back and clean up the discrepancies – but Jerry had no way to really do that! So he and I spent a week wielding paint brushes and crescent wrenches up and down that tower. Well, the view was good and it was something to do. And climbing 625' to the top was great exercise.

In late May or early June, I learned by telephone that some of the station personnel were in Madrid at Torrejon Air Force Base, and were being sent to the site. I was a little dismayed – no station, no quarters for them, etc. After phoning Naples, one of the MEDSEC officers made a hasty trip over, and we negotiated for hotel rooms for them in a small hotel annex in Estartit. I made arrangements for meals at a couple small local restaurants, on credit, to be paid twice monthly. I met the first two or three men at the railroad station in Flassa, about 25 kilometers from Estartit. Before long all two dozen men were onsite – four chief petty officers, several first class and others including a couple nonrated young fellows. It was a trying time for a while. Their hotel accommodations weren't very good – no private bathrooms, no central heating, etc. And quite a few of the younger men showed up with no money. I loaned money to them until I was nearly broke myself, to pay their food bills, then resorted to loaning money from my official "imprest fund", a \$500 renewable cash fund I was given to pay for local supplies and emergencies. Loaning money to the crew was not authorized! Luckily no one audited the books. The crew and I carved out a section of the temporary warehouse as our "turf" – a desk for me, etc. I tried to keep the crew busy with training and "busywork." I remember one week we just recovered used lumber around the site – pulled nails, sorted and stacked it. I had no idea what we'd use it for. We never did!

As 4 July 1961 approached, the chief petty officers and I talked about having some sort of American-style Independence Day celebration. We figured a beach cookout, and a bonfire would be appropriate. One day in mid-June I discussed the idea with Mike, the BRW construction supervisor, and he thought it was a great idea. He "bounced it off of" his American foremen, about a half dozen of them, and they all agreed to chip in money to help out. One day Mike told me he had a munitions-demolitions man in his crew, a Spaniard, who was also a professional fireworks craftsman. He asked if we'd like a fireworks display at the picnic, and said he'd provide it courtesy of the company if I wished. I wholeheartedly agreed. As Independence Day approached, we "Coasties" hauled at least three truckloads of scrap lumber and other wood we scrounged

down to the beach and made a huge pile for our bonfire. We bought picnic stuff – hot dogs, hamburgers, beer and soft drinks, etc. from the Air Force station at Rosas, and we fashioned a couple big charcoal grills from split 55 gallon drums. I bought charcoal from a vendor who produced his own charcoal in a large kiln, the charcoal pieces consisting of small pieces of wood – branches etc. – “coked” into charcoal in his kiln. It was the best charcoal I’ve ever used, far superior to the bricket stuff we use here in the U.S. The “powder monkey” fireworks craftsman had apparently been making rockets etc. for days, and spent almost the entire day erecting his display down the beach from our picnic area.

In late afternoon, we Americans gathered on the beach – 25 “Coasties”, about seven civilian contractor folk and several of their wives, and a number of local Spanish folk we had invited. Before dusk, a steady stream of Spanish people started to arrive and line the beach, politely not encroaching on our picnic area. As dark approached there must have been over 1,000 people assembled, much to our surprise. We learned from one of our Spanish friends that fireworks were extremely popular in Spain, and the word had spread that the “Americanos” were going to set some off at sunset. So, as darkness descended, we gave the word to start the fireworks – and quite a display it was! I’d guess our “powder monkey” sent up 40 or more impressive rockets with all sorts of colors and patterns, and then at the end lit off a pyrotechnic American flag he’d fashioned on a large wooden stand down the beach. He set off another ten or so red, white and blue rockets as a finale. Everyone cheered, Spanish and American! Then everyone cheered again when our huge bonfire erupted into a tower of flames. It was quite a day.

Construction of the station was proceeding at a furious pace, but too slow to suit me. I had been ordered to take all possible actions to have the station “on the air” by July 1 – but obviously the buildings would not be done by then. Jerry Lesperance and I opened discussions with the BRW supervisor, and Mike agreed to expedite completion of the electronics portion of the signal power building, and would provide and hook up a temporary electrical generator. In

return I and my crew would lay electrical and electronics cables in the trenches between the signal power and transmitter buildings, and we'd erect the large "screen room" inside the signal power building as soon as it was finished enough to give us access. At last we had some COAST GUARD work to do. I pushed the start button on getting the station's outfitting equipment shipped over, including the electronics equipment. Some came by ship to Barcelona, but a great deal of the outfitting equipment was flown from Brooklyn by Coast Guard C-130. One of our first significant new pieces of equipment was a brand new Dodge 1-1/2 ton truck. Not long after we received it, I came across the chief boatswain mate and the chief engineman having a heated argument. Seems the BMC wanted to send the truck somewhere, the ENC wanted to do some maintenance and they were having a scheduling jurisdiction debate. I wasn't sure what to do, so I told them the truck was mine – I wanted the BMC to schedule its use, the ENC to maintain it, and to call me when they needed more guidance. The problem went away.

When our first C-130 load of gear was due at the Barcelona International Airport, several of the crew and I set out with our Dodge truck, my pickup and a big flatbed semi provided by the construction contractor. When we arrived at the airport, about 110 kilometers south of Estartit, we found the C-130 sitting on the tarmac with two armed Guardia Civil men guarding it and the huge stack of crates, boxes etc. sitting behind the aircraft. Not a Coastie was in sight! I sought out the airport's customs office and found an official to whom I presented some sort of document that allowed me to clear our materials into the country. He looked at it, read it, and handed it back. With a smile and a salute, he thanked me and said something about having a good trip back to Estartit. I asked if he didn't want to have someone come out and inventory the load etc. He smiled and said that the document I showed him had designated me a customs officer of the Spanish government. He said I had the same authority that he did. He said he'd send over a fork lift. We loaded everything onto the trucks and headed back to the station site.

The next weeks were extremely busy, mostly 7-day-a-week workdays as we pulled cable, erected the screen room and installed electronics equipment. We started with the transmitting equipment, huge transmitters capable of transmitting one megawatt of pulsed power. With not much to go on in way of wiring diagrams, etc., we learned as we went. ETC Jeffrey Jackman was the senior ET, and he led the effort with my help. But everyone worked – enginemen, ETs, our cook and so on. We installed the LORAN antenna coupler and dummy load equipment and connected to the tower. After the screen room was in, we installed the LORAN timing equipment and the radio gear. ENC Exley was the senior engineer, and he and his electrician led the effort to wire up power from the temporary generator provided by BRW. It was a happy day when we got our radio communications equipment operating. For the first time, we had direct communications with the office in Naples, with the LORAN stations in Italy, Turkey and Libya, and with the monitor station on the island of Sardinia. As 1 August approached, it appeared we might be ready to go “on air” that date. So I sent a message to Commander Mediterranean Section saying we’d be ready. The Section Office ordered the master station in Italy, and the “slave” stations Turkey and Libya, and our station in Spain, to prepare to configure into a four-station LORAN net at a specified time on 1 August.

On the date specified we were ready. We had our equipment up and running and had been transmitting signals into the dummy load. We had the timing equipment locked-on to the master station in Italy, and stood practice watches for several days before the official on-air date and time. When the time arrived, the master went off-air briefly to reconfigure his LORAN timers, as did the other two slave stations. When the master resumed transmitting, we were ready and transferred our signals to the antenna seconds after the master signal was locked-on. We were operational! We now had a complete LORAN C “star” configuration covering the Med and surrounding areas, for use by our nuclear submarines and other DOD users. The next two weeks or so went fairly smoothly, though it was difficult for the crew to stand radio, generator and loran watches and commute to and from the leased hotel rooms several miles away.

But we managed. Meanwhile, we were also engaged in calibration and adjustment of our signals by taking power and spectrum measurements at various sites in the near area using portable equipment.

Construction proceeded rapidly. By the end of August, the signal-power building was complete and we were able to get our own generators on the line, get started with spare parts storage, etc. We all worked hard, but the crew seemed willing and in decent spirits. My major concern then was to ensure I had “healthy and rested people” on the job and on the watches. Estartit was full of tourists, mostly English, and the crew was having a ball! Combine the friendly English tourists with cheap drinks – perhaps 15 cents per rum and coke or a dime for a beer – and nightly partying certainly was in the financial reach of some of my guys. Still, there were few problems. However, I was sure anxious to see the station mess and billeting facilities finished, so we could move aboard. That part of the construction seemed to be agonizingly slowly – and in fact, we didn’t occupy the station until after Thanksgiving.

In late August, CDR H.S. Pearson came over from Naples to look things over. I was nervous, but pleased to have him come over. I thought we’d done well in getting the station operational under difficult circumstances, and was proud of our work. He spent two days with us, seemed well satisfied with our status, and complimented me and my crew for a job well done.

Sometime in September I received word from MEDSEC that the new MEDSEC commander, CAPT. E.C. Allen, would be coming over for a visit and inspection along with another captain from Third Coast Guard District in New York. I was directed to meet them at Barcelona International Airport and provide transportation to Estartit. I also arranged hotel accommodations in Estartit. For several days we worked hard on making the transmitter building and signal-power building as presentable as possible, and cleaned up around the station as best we could, given that 75 or so construction personnel were still busily working on the other two buildings. I traveled down to Barcelona a week in advance and

made a call on the Spanish Navy sector commander, a kindly rear admiral whom had been helpful in the past. I made arrangements for a call on the admiral by CAPT Allen and the visiting captain, and sent a message to MEDSEC outlining the arrangements.

On the prescribed day, early in the morning, I headed for Barcelona with a sedan and driver provided by Mike the BRW supervisor. I had instructed the crew to be prepared for personnel and station inspection at about 1400, my estimate of the time when we'd arrive back at Estartit. I met the flight, greeted the captains, and after we'd retrieved their baggage – cleared through customs by me and my “magic document” – I had the driver head for the Spanish Navy headquarters. CAPT Allen then said he'd like to cancel the meeting and do a little sightseeing. I was horrified! If we “stood up” the Spanish admiral, it would be a terrible affront. I tried to convince CAPT Allen, and he finally reluctantly agreed to a brief meeting. We spent a scant 15 minutes with the Spanish admiral, CAPT Allen anxious to be on the way, and I made the excuse that my crew was standing by for inspection. The admiral was gracious. After leaving his headquarters, I told the driver to head for Estartit and told CAPT Allen I'd picked out a little restaurant in a town enroute where we could lunch. He told me we weren't going to Estartit just yet and that he and the other captain wanted to see the international village in Barcelona. I tried to dissuade him, telling him the crew would be assembled and standing by for his inspection by 1400. But he insisted, so off to the international village we went. The two captains spent nearly three hours wandering through the shops and displays as I sat fuming in the car. Eventually, I found a telephone and with some difficulty was able to get through to the station and tell them we would be delayed by an indeterminate amount of time.

We finally made it to Estartit about 1730, and CAPT Allen and the other gentleman spent a scant half hour looking the place over before I was ordered to take them to their hotel. I was frustrated, angry and had great difficulty keeping my mouth shut – but LTJGs don't often win “tiffs” with captains! I could, however, sense that the captain from New York was both embarrassed and sympathetic

with my situation.

The next morning I met the two captains for breakfast, got them checked out of their hotel and their luggage loaded. They had an early afternoon flight to Madrid, as I recall, and then were going on to the LORAN A station in northwest Spain. I begged off accompanying them to the airport, and sent one of my petty officers to assist them. I could tell CAPT Allen was annoyed, but I frankly didn't care.

As construction progressed, we began to occupy the station in "bits and pieces." The CO quarters and office building was completed next, and though I didn't move to the station until the whole crew did, I at least had an office from which to work. As I remember, we finally occupied that station sometime just after Thanksgiving. We had held a typical American Thanksgiving dinner in the dining room of a hotel in Estartit, prepared by the hotel owner's family and our assigned cook. We provided most of the foodstuffs, purchased from the small U.S. Air Force commissary at Rosas. It was a pleasant and festive occasion, but many of the crew obviously missed family and friends.

Moving onboard the station was a highlight of our tour. We finally had our own mess hall, rooms of our own, etc. And we were able to start wearing Coast Guard uniforms again, at least onboard the station. We had plenty of work to do, but being "close to the job" was sure a help.

One day in January 1962, I think, I was in the office doing paperwork when a black chauffeured sedan drove up in front. A Spanish Air Force officer, a colonel, exited and I greeted him at the door and invited him in. He spoke better English than I did, thank goodness. After exchanging pleasantries and serving him coffee, I inquired as to the reason for his visit. As politely and gently as he could, it seemed to me, he informed me that he was sent from Madrid to order me to cease transmitting our LORAN signals immediately. I was shocked and speechless! The colonel waited patiently while I struggled to regain my composure and consider my options. Finally, I carefully explained to him that my operational commander was in Naples, Italy and that with all due respect, it was

my position that an order to cease LORAN transmissions was needed from my operational commander . The colonel responded that he understood my situation and that his superiors would contact mine in the matter. He cautioned me that I should expect a “cease transmissions” order within a day or two. I inquired into the nature of the problem, but he declined to enlighten me, telling me that he was unsure if he was authorized to do so. Without much more conversation, he excused himself, thanked me for the hospitality, entered his vehicle and left.

I made haste down to the signal power building and sent a message to MEDSEC in Naples outline the events that had just occurred. Later in the day, a radiotelephone conversation with MEDSEC personnel yielded no new information. They were as in the dark as I was. Sure enough, two days later I was ordered to shut down LORAN transmissions and to operate only into the “dummy load” daily to keep the transmitting equipment operational. We were instructed to keep the timing equipment active and locked on the master station, and to be ready to resume live transmitting immediately on notice.

The remaining two-and-a-half months of my tour at Estartit were an anticlimax, actually. We never did resume live transmission, and I was never told why. I later learned that our signals were “clobbering” a low-frequency tactical net between France and Algiers, and the French were engaged in a desperate military action in Algeria trying to maintain control there. As history records, they lost. Eventually, though, the Coast Guard was able to install filtering equipment for the French and take other corrective equipment modifications which permitted LORAN Station Estartit to become active again. I believe this occurred in early summer 1962.

Shortly after we occupied the station I received written orders from CAPT Allen, MEDSEC commander. These orders basically instructed me that no liberty was authorized from the station, that no visitors were allowed other than official visitors, and that crew members were allowed off the station only on official business. I was astonished and angry!! Apparently, we were expected to

conduct ourselves in circumstances not unlike a cloistered monastery. After some consideration, I gathered the crew and explained the “rules.” My best explanation was that we needed to do that to preserve the essence of “isolated duty”, and that compensatory leave could only be provided under these circumstances. At that time, personnel assigned to isolated LORAN duty received an extra 30 days of leave each year to compensate for isolated duty at stations where families were not permitted. However, it was totally unreasonable for anyone to expect that two dozen healthy young Coasties were going to stay confined to the station boundary. So the CPOs and I considered options to let our crew get “off the hill” without jeopardizing compensatory leave and hopefully not submitting me to undue risk for disobeying orders! Basically, we sent “parties” of crewmen to do “official business” in town, at the Air Force station in Rosas, etc. We always sent three or more, with a responsible petty officer among them. When we needed to get supplies from the naval facility in Barcelona, I always sent four people (all who could ride in our 1-1/2 ton truck cab). I usually sent them in late afternoon, sometimes on a Friday, to ensure they needed to stay at least overnight in Barcelona.

Later on, as the end of my tour approached, I was sent another “epistle from Allen” which instructed me to compute compensatory absence for the crew only based on the time each man spent onboard the station after we occupied it – the time they were billeted in leased space in town would not count. Since the entire crew was there unaccompanied – no families allowed – I was both aghast and angry. I had no alternative but to comply, and did so – but I appealed in writing, and sent a letter to Commandant Coast Guard via the chain of command. Not trusting CAPT Allen to forward it to Headquarters, I sent a copy to the captain in New York who had accompanied CAPT Allen to the station the previous fall. This officer, whose name I unfortunately can’t recall, had let me know I could contact him if I had problems on which I might need advice. He was the Third District Aids to Navigation Officer at that time (1962). In the copy I sent him, I enclosed a personal note explaining the whole circumstance, including CAPT Allen’s instructions to “cloister” the crew onboard.

I never received a response from either MEDSEC or Headquarters, but I can tell you that before 1962 ended the policies concerning liberty and compensatory absence were redefined by Commandant Coast Guard. Basically, unaccompanied tours were required where family support facilities were inadequate – lack of housing, schools, medical, etc. Anyone assigned to a station where families were not permitted was entitled to 30 days of compensatory absence per year, over and above regular earned leave. Regardless of that, if there were opportunities for “liberty” – time away from the station for recreation, etc., this type of “freedom from duty” was to be permitted. The first Estartit crew members were the only ones “screwed over” by CAPT Allen’s orders.

I received orders to be detached upon relief and proceed to duty under instruction at RCA Institute, New York, New York. This entailed a 24-month course of instruction in electronics technology. I was relieved by LTJG W. N. Schobert on 26 March 1962. Bill was a ‘59 graduate of the Academy, and retired some years later as a commander.

Sometime in the year 2000, I was contacted by Coast Guard folks from Activities Europe letting me now that LORSTA Estartit was being decommissioned and turned over to Spanish authorities. I was invited to attend the ceremony in Estartit, but declined.

In the forty years since I left Estartit, the names of most of the crewmen have drifted away from me. I remember some: ETC Jeffrey Jackman, ENCS Exley, HMC Graff BMC Holman???? (he was a fine chief and functioned as station “XO”) ET1 Rosenberg EN3 Gray – an “outer banker” SN McGuire (an 18-19 year old from Boston who was always in trouble).

AN 'ASIDE' - THE USCG OFFICER PROMOTION SYSTEM and my confusing experiences with it!

When I received my commission as "Ensign, U.S. Coast Guard" in 1957, it was a commission categorized as "temporary, regular." All ex-enlisted Coast Guard OCS graduates were so designated, and our permanent rank was that which we held before we became officers. Mine was ET1 (E-6). We held no commission "approved by Congress" as did "permanent" officers.

All regular officers, temporary or permanent, were required to participate in an officer promotion examination and education program as outlined in the appropriate Commandant Instruction(s). This program consisted basically of a requirement to complete two promotion examinations per year, offered on three specific dates per year. Exams could be one of several from a long list that included such subjects as celestial navigation, communications, ordnance and gunnery, seamanship, shipboard damage control, aids to navigation and so on. Each of these subjects, with a few exceptions, was prepared for by taking an appropriate correspondence course issued either by the Coast Guard or the Navy. All regular officers of the rank of LCDR (O-4) and below were required to participate, and must complete a minimum of two successful tests per calendar year. If an officer desired, he could take three exams in a year, but that did not lessen the requirement to complete two the following year. The promotion exam requirements were rigid. An officer **MUST** pass two exams per year from the approved list. Failure of an exam merited one try at reexamination, to be taken at the next date offered. Failure to pass the required two examinations each year resulted in an officer being removed from the line of promotion! Failure was the "kiss of death" to a junior officer's career aspirations. Few exceptions, to my knowledge, were granted. Reserve officers were exempted, but were permitted to participate if they so desired, as an enhancement to their promotion/retention prospects.

Both temporary and reserve officers could seek permanent regular commissions

via a structured integration process also outlined in a "Commandant Instruction." For temporary regular officers who were not college graduates, this process included taking a certain number of the system's professional-subject promotion exams, completion of a specialized college level assessment examination, and an officer's personal application for a permanent commission along with a favorable command endorsement.

Early on after I received my temporary commission and during my first assignment on USCGC ACTIVE, I became very familiar with the programs both for promotion exams and for integration. They were complementary programs to an extent – integration exam requirements for professional subjects were all contained in the promotion exam list requirements for LT (O-3) and below. I set out to complete both requirements. The permanent commission integration process was lengthy, requiring at least two or three years to complete. I recall that I was able to complete three of the integration exams in the first 18 months, all of which met promotion exam requirements. The integration process requirements also stated that officers integrated at the rank of O-2 or below would be offered seniority in rank amongst their peers at the level currently occupied. Officers in the grade of LT (O-3) or above would be integrated as the most junior officer in their pay grade at the time integration was approved. It was a matter of importance to get a permanent commission before the rank of LT was achieved, to avoid losing "seniority numbers".

While engaged in this endeavor I was transferred to First Coast Guard District in Boston. While there, I happened to read that chief petty officer exams would be offered in the near future. I approached the district personnel officer, a pleasant and helpful commander whom I cannot name any more. At my request, he queried Headquarters (enlisted personnel division) to see if I could participate in the CPO examination process. I further asked if I could take the Chief Radioman exam in lieu of the Chief Electronics Technician exam, as I reasoned the RMC exam might require less study than the ETC exam. To my surprise, Headquarters said I could apply for either exam provided I completed practical

factors requirements for the specialty I chose. I asked the assistance of the district communications officer, LT Horace Holmgren (Academy '50), and he agreed to examine me for practical factors requirements for Chief Radioman. I subsequently took the exam, and in late 1960 was promoted to the permanent grade of RMC (E-7). My temporary grade was LTJG (O-2). I still have my CPO Certificate dated 31 January 1960, signed by Admiral A.C. Richmond, Coast Guard Commandant.

During the same period I plugged along on the integration process. I took the two-year college level exam on the only date offered in 1960, in the 13th District office in Seattle, after an all-night flight from Boston to Seattle following the abrupt death of my stepmother. I was surprised to pass the exam, and would have delayed it a year except that I faced the prospect of possibly losing seniority in rank if I was promoted to LT (O-3) before integration was approved. I finally completed the requirements and sent in my request for permanent commission in late 1960. I was approved and offered integration as permanent officer in March 1961. I eventually received my permanent promotion to LTJG (O-2) dated 15 March 1961, with date of rank from 1 May 1959, the day I was promoted to LTJG (temporary). It was signed by Douglas Dillon, Secretary of Treasury, "by and for the President".

A curious aside to this story is that some officers in my OCS class, and others given temporary commissions in the mid and late 1950s, who did not seek integration as permanent officers were tendered permanent commissions in the mid 1960s anyhow, without any loss of "numbers." In the interim, they had all received permanent commissions as Warrant Officer (W-2) when they received their temporary promotions to LT (O-3). To this day I feel a little "short changed" somehow!!! They all just didn't have to do as much as I did to get my permanent commission!

But my motives at the time were sound – job security! And it worked.

My OCS class mate Joe Tanguay fell afoul of the system. He failed promotion

exam twice, both while in preflight school, I think. He was a “permanent ensign” for quite some time and lost a couple years seniority. He was by all accounts a fine aviator, an aircraft commander as an ensign. Eventually he was reinstated to the line of promotion and retired as a captain (O-6) after a distinguished career. Joe succumbed to cancer and died in the early 2000s.