A Heinous Act of Cowardice: The Sinking of the Diamond Shoal Lightship #71

by Kim M. Ruth

While the Lighthouse Service has, through the years, lost a number of lightships for various reasons, ranging from errors in judgement to being rammed by the vessels they were placed to protect, Diamond Shoal #71 was the only one ever destroyed by a U-boat.

The United States was late getting into World War I, joining the Allies on April 6, 1917. An act authorizing mobilization of the Coast Guard as part of the Naval Establishment had been passed January 28, 1915, however the transfer of the Lighthouse Service from the Department of Commerce to the Navy Department was left at the discretion of the President.

On April 11, 1917, five days after war was declared but two days before it was made public, an Executive Order placed the Coast Guard and the Lighthouse Service under the command of the Navy Department. As a result of this order forty-six lighthouse tenders, four lightships, and twenty-one light-stations were absorbed into the Navy chain of command. One of these lightships was the Diamond Shoal Lightship #71.

Diamond Shoal #71, was built in Quincy, Massachusets in 1897. She was 112 feet long, drew 20 feet, and because of the dangerous isolation of the station, was equipped with 5 water-tight compartments, only 2 of which would be needed to keep the vessel afloat. She had a 26'6" beam, 13 foot depth, and displaced 450 tons. She was equipped with 350hp engines, and was held on station by mushroom anchors weighing 2000 pounds. Her normal complement was 5 officers and 10 men.

U-140 (short for Untersee boat or submarine) was named the Kapitanleutnant Otto Weddigen, in honor of the German submarine hero who was lost earlier in the war, and left Kiel, Germany, on June 22, 1918. U-140 was equipped with 4 bow and 4 stern torpedo tubes and 35 torpedoes, 2 6-inch guns and two 4-inch guns, 19 50cm mines and twelve machine guns. The submarine was 380 feet long, one of a class of very large cruiser submarines with a 24 foot beam, and drew 25 feet. Equipped with twin screws and five sets of engines she had a maximum surface speed of 26 knots, and could do 12 knots submerged. Her certified maximum depth was 495 feet. She carried a crew of 6 officers and 102 men. Her commander was Kapitanleutnant Kophamel, who previously commanded the U-35 and U-151. A veteran of 10 patrols, mostly in the North Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, he ended the war as Germany’s 6th ranking submarine commander, with a total tonnage sunk of 190,000.

The U-boat’s target was believed to be the harbor works and Naval stores at Wilmington, Delaware. It was expected that this port would become the victim of shelling attacks by the U-boat, but it was at Cape Hatteras that the paths of the U-boat and lightship would cross.

U-140 was spotted several times on her way to the Eastern Coast, but it was not until July 27th that her
When the submarine surfaced and confronted the crew, Kapitanleutnant Kophamel suggested that they return to the ship and exchange life-boats. He allowed them to stock up provisions and get clear of the vessel before sending the Seaman to the bottom with bombs. The crew of the Seaman was picked up three days later by a passing British steamer.

Late morning on August 6th, found the submarine within sight of the Diamond Shoal Lightship. Kophamel knew that the lightship would be a congregating point for shipping and it was there that he encountered the 3,024 coal-laden American Steamship Merak, bound for Chile from Newport News, Virginia.

The sea was calm with a southwest breeze and hot hazy skies. The U-boat surfaced near the Merak, and began firing. The Merak began zig-zagging south at full speed ahead. The gun-crew on the U-boat was having a difficult time, firing over 30 rounds at the Merak without a hit, but luck was against the Merak: she grounded on the edge of the shoal. Her crew quickly abandoned her.

Meanwhile, aboard the lightship, First Mate Walter L. Barnett heard the sound of shellfire, and climbed the vessel's mast to get a better look. About half a mile to the north of the lightship he spotted the U-boat, and in the distance beyond, the Merak. Barnett had only recently been transferred aboard #71, and on this day was in command of the vessel as Captain Charles Swanburg and two other seamen were on liberty ashore. Also aboard the lightship were the cook, engineer, 3 firemen, 2 seamen, and two Navy wireless operators.

Barnett hurried to the ship's wireless room, a small shack that had been retro-fitted onto the vessel's deck. There he had the Navy wireless operator on duty send the message "Enemy submarine shelling unknown ship E.N.E. 1/4 mile off lightship."1 It is likely that Kophamel had no intentions of attacking the lightship as long as it remained "neutral", for it aided him as much as his enemies. Whether Kophamel was distraught at the prospect of finding his hunting ground suddenly barren, worried that the lightship's wireless had revealed his location to nearby destroyers, or angered by the lightship's intervention is unknown. It is certain that the U-boat was monitoring wireless traffic, and heard the lightship's warning and that this was the immediate cause of Kophamel's turning his attention from the Merak to the lightship.

According to Barnett's account, it was about 2:30 p.m. when the U-boat's first shot destroyed the wireless shack. The next five shots missed the lightship altogether. The lightship's crew was quickly roused and the life-boat was put into the water. One of the crew, Guy Quidlely, testified that he left the ship by jumping out a porthole wearing nothing but his B.V.D.'s and a pair of pants2. Chief engineer Roberts left his false teeth behind.3 The rest escaped with nothing more than the
clothes on their backs.

It took the crew from 2:30 p.m. to 9:30 that night to row the 12 miles to shore.

Having disabled the lightship's wireless, and knowing that the lightship was firmly anchored, the attention of the U-boat returned to the Merak. A crew from the U-boat boarded the vessel, placed charges, and sent the Merak to the bottom.

Bastin, the Second Officer from the O.B. Jennings, had a unique view to watch the drama unfold as a prisoner aboard the U-boat. He later stated that the U-boat shelled the lightship's life-boat with its 4-inch gun, until the U-boat could no longer follow the life-boat because of the shallow water. The U-boat then returned to the lightship and sunk it with gun-fire.

The crew of the lightship eventually came ashore near the Cape Flatteras wireless station, where the Naval authorities were notified of the attack.

While the lightship technically was a part of the United States Navy, and was in fact a Naval Wireless station and therefore an enemy vessel, no one can deny the immorality of the act of sinking an unarmed aid to navigation.

Because of the courage of Barnett and the wireless operator, 28 vessels heard the warning and took refuge in the Lookout Bidet near Beaufort.

As if by Divine Justice, after the war was over, U-140 was given to the United States by Germany, as partial payment of war reparations. Fittingly, she was used for artillery practice and was sent to the bottom by the destroyer Dickerson on July 22, 1921, off Cape Charles, near the graves of her victims. [Condensed from a larger work - © 1991].


CONCLUSION:

A Quest for Fulfillment

by George M. Feirer, Historian

Even two dedicated, intelligent vagabonds, such as my son and I, could not hope to see every California lighthouse in one trip. This, of course, can always be reason for another trip along what has to be the most spectacularly scenic highway in the world. The Pacific Coast Highway is a must for everyone alive; but there are areas that, for the faint-hearted behind the steering wheel, should only be a north-bound trip. That way, you will at least have one lane between some rather precipitous drop-offs.

One light we missed is the Santa Cruz Memorial Lighthouse, built in 1867 as a memorial to Mark Abbott, by his parents, Mr. & Mrs. Charles Abbott. Mark drowned while surfing nearby and the Coast Guard accepted it as an official lighthouse. The access road to Ano Nuevo Point Lighthouse slipped by us without fanfare, or at least without sufficient notice for us to find it and therefore also went on the "next-time" list.

Pigeon Point - Photo by George Feirer

Pigeon Point Lighthouse is rather dramatic with a red roof over the lantern room and black galleries below. The tower is rather a creamy white. All-in-all it's a pretty lighthouse. It's 115 foot tower makes it a candidate for a striking photo and as it can be seen continuously on the drive up the coast, brings forth Oh's and Ah's as you get closer. The light is now automated and to assist in preventing vandalism, the out-buildings are used by American Youth Hostels. Presumably, the number of people occupying the grounds prevents destruction and the appearance indicated that the area is reasonably protected.

Personal experience with the American Youth Hostels, or at least with one of its middle or low management people, however, left a lot to be desired at the Point Montara Lighthouse, which was our next stop.

The Point Montara light is a rather "cute" little structure set on the ocean side of a number of beautiful trees and supporting buildings. Far enough away from the highway, viewing it is difficult and photography almost impossible. Upon requesting the opportunity to walk through the grounds to get a decent picture with a promise not to disturb anything but the molecules of air we re-aligned as we walked, we were rejected rather
telephoto shot of the Alcatraz Island Lighthouse. This is the second lighthouse on the island, as the walls of the prison grew higher than the first light built in 1854. The beacon presently seen shines out 200 feet over the bay.

This has not been a complete coverage of all the lighthouses between San Diego and San Francisco, but if your appetite has not been whetted before, perhaps it will be now.

**Freebies and other low cost goodies**

From Rich Hellenbrecht

Rhode Island Department of Economic Development, 7 Jackson Walkway, Providence, Rhode Island 02903. Publishes a very nice Rhode Island Lighthouse Brochure - With fold out and many photographs. They usually enclose a Rhode Island Road Map also. Free.

Michigan Lighthouse Brochure, Michigan Department of Transportation Public Information Office, P.O. Box 30050, Lansing, MI 48909. Publishes a brochure that folds out into a poster with locations of 104 lighthouses and information about some of the major ones.

Cape Cod Life - May 1990 "Lost Lighthouses of Cape Cod and the Island," by Cliff Henderson. Lighthouses of Cape Cod and areas - 5 pages. Historical Society photographs, map with lighthouses listed for Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Island. Lists a few that have given their light and life to the sea. Write to: Cape Cod Life, P.O. Box 222, Osterville, MA 02655. Cost is $3.00 per issue plus postage and handling.

Seaway Trail - Read about each of the 18 lighthouses along the Seaway Trail. Article written by Jim Tinney and illustrated by Leo Kushel. A map at the front of the magazine shows the lighthouse route. Called "Journey - New York State's 'Seaway Trail'," March 1989 issue. Available from Seaway Trail Inc., 202 Poucher Hall, SUNY-Oswego, Oswego, NY 13126. Call 1-800-24-SEAWY (USA) or 1-800-36SEAWY (from NY). Cost is $2.95 and $1.00 postage and handling.

**New Jersey Chapter - Quarterly Meeting**

The quarterly meeting of the New Jersey Chapter will take place on December 7, 1991, at the firehouse in North Wildwood. There will be a short business meeting at 11:00 a.m., followed by lunch break, and show and tell. We will also have a short course on photographing lighthouses by member Jeff Fernandez.

At 1:00 our speakers will be Ed Hewitt, Keeper of the Light, and Al Mouklas, Chairman of the Hereford Inlet
Lighthouse Commission. Afterwards, we will tour the lighthouse.

You should have received a special mailing in mid-October with a ballot, t-shirt and sweatshirt order forms and a map showing the location of the meeting. If you didn’t, the firehouse is located on the corner of 2nd Avenue and New Jersey Avenue in North Wildwood. The lighthouse is at 1st and Central Avenues.

**Conover Beacon Update**

At this writing (October 20th) Coast Guard Commander Beck has forwarded our request for a determination of ownership of the beacon to the Commander, Maintenance Logistics Command, New York. We wish to thank CWO4 Mike Blank and Commander C. C. Beck for their efforts on our behalf.

![Shrewsburry River Beacon??](image)

**New Jersey Chapter T-Shirts**

In case you missed the September meeting, or joined our organization after mid-October, the New Jersey Chapter now has T-shirts, sweatshirts, totes, and baseball caps - all featuring the logo Rich Hellenbrecht designed for us. We made a special mailing back in October so that you could take advantage of this opportunity to get good quality items at a savings and develop our chapter pride and spirit. If you returned your order by November 11, you will be able to pick up your items at the December 7th meeting in Hereford Inlet. If you missed this opportunity, all is not lost; we will do this again soon, as we are sure you don’t want to be the only one at the meetings without your New Jersey Chapter Sweats! We are not planning to carry a stock of these items so we have to order a quantity as a group. Many thanks to Elaina Ryan who has been co-ordinating this effort.

The Crew neck sweatshirt, hooded sweatshirt, and T-shirt are available in either blue with white logo, or white with blue logo. They are 50/50 Jerzee Russell material. The zippered tote is royal blue with white logo and 100% cotton canvas, 22"x15"x12". The baseball cap is royal blue mesh with white front panel and logo in blue.

Prices are reasonable at $15.00 for the crew neck sweat, $8.00 for the T-shirt, $15.00 for the sweat pants (plain), $20.00 for the hooded sweatshirt, $10.00 for the zippered tote, and $6.00 for the baseball cap.

Sweats and T-shirts are available in Youth size Small (6-8), Medium (10-12) or Large (14-16). Adult sizes S-XXL. Please add $3.00 for XXL crew and $2.00 for XL T-shirt.

The sweatshirts and T-shirt tend to run small; please order at least one size if not two sizes larger. WE CANNOT EXCHANGE OR REFUND FOR ANY

**Unidentified Beacon**

Back in issue number 3, March 1991, we ran a picture of an unidentified beacon (photo below) supposedly between Long Branch and Atlantic Highlands. The photo was taken somewhere around 1900-1910. We asked readers to help with the identification. We promised them to print any guesses or information we received. While no one could positively identify the beacon, the best guesses seem to be that it might have been a beacon on the Shrewsburry River. Jim Gowdy uncovered some journals of the light station at The Shrewsburry River Beacon Light Station at Highlands, N.J. at the National Archives in Sutland, Maryland, for the period June 4, 1898 to June 30, 1907. It seems the beacons were lighted from early spring to December or January. Presumably, ice then made the navigation of the river impossible and the lights were extinguished until the spring thaw. It appears that there was more than one light, the names Rocky Point, Northwest Light, Sands Point Light, Low Moor, Little Silver and Goose Neck Point are mentioned. Which one is pictured is still unknown.
Correction...

It was William Burket who had the exhibit at the Union Beach Library, not Walter Burdett, as we published. Apologies - Editor.

From the President's Desk

by Jack Granger

As we enter 1992 let me first extend the wishes of all your officers to you for a great year.

We have seen our organization grow to approximately 270 members. We hope that you have enjoyed this relationship and that you will be renewing your membership for 1992. We have some interesting plans for the coming year. Again, we urge you to give us your ideas for activities as THIS IS YOUR ORGANIZATION AND WE ARE HERE TO PLEASE YOU!!

I have related to you my relationship with Trinity House in London which services 68 lighthouses and lightships in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Gibraltar. In the last issue of their quarterly "Flash," there was my "Letter to the Editor." As a result I have heard from five people in England, Wales, the Netherlands, and Scotland. These folks, including a keeper at an English light station, are anxious to communicate and have sent me pictures and information. You can write to Keeper John B. Mobbs, at Fog Horn Cottage, Flamborough Head Lighthouse, Near Bridlington, East Yorkshire, Y015 1 AR, England. Contact me for the names of the others.

Herb Entwistle, President of the Virginia Chapter, and I have been discussing joint activities. A few of our members attended a Virginia Chapter boat trip on the Chesapeake Bay on October 19th.

We are discussing a meeting on March 28, 1992, with the Virginia group, probably at Fenwick Island lighthouse, north of Ocean City, Maryland. You will hear more about this at our quarterly meeting, December 7, 1991, at the Hereford Inlet Lighthouse.

I have finally been able to contact the Massachusetts Chapter and look forward to joint activities with them in the same way we work with Herb Entwistle and his Virginia Chapter.

Your increasing involvement in our quarterly meetings is quite obvious and we urge you to continue the trend.

Once again, we are happy with our relationship with you and hope it will continue to grow.

At this point we are attempting to schedule our March 1992 meeting to be held at Barnegat Light on March 14, 1992. Plans are not finalized, but we pass along this preliminary information at this time.

Renewals

This is your last issue of The Beam this year! We invite and encourage you to renew your membership. A renewal form was enclosed with the last issue, and another reminder is enclosed with this one. No other notice will be sent. Please return your check and renewal form to Carl Nelson, either in person at the December 7th meeting, or by mail to Carl Nelson, Treasurer, 50 South Main Street, Unit #2, Medford, NJ 08053.

Seasons Greetings

The Officers and Committee-people wish to extend their best wishes to you and yours during this holiday season, and happiness, good health, and prosperity in the coming year.

The Beam, the official journal of the United States Lighthouse Society - New Jersey Chapter, is published quarterly. Membership dues in the New Jersey Chapter are $15.00 single and $20.00 family. Memberships are for the calendar year. Back issues are available for members joining mid-year.

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