

Welcome Aboard WLV 605... A United States Lighthouse Society Resource

You are standing on the former Coast Guard lightship, WLV 605. Lightships were floating lighthouses anchored in areas where it was too deep, expensive or impractical to construct a lighthouse. Sometimes they were anchored (stationed) to show the entrance to a harbor or bay. One such station, SAN FRANCISCO, existed at the entrance to San Francisco Bay from 1898 until 1971. Many different vessels occupied the station as SAN FRANCISCO or RELIEF. Each Lighthouse Service, and later Coast Guard District, that had lightship stations also had a vessel called RELIEF. The relief vessel took the place of the “station” ship when that vessel came into port for overhaul.

Lightships displayed a light at the top of one or two masts and in areas of fog also sounded a fog signal. The fog signals used over the years consisted of bells (rung by hand), whistles, trumpets, sirens and horns. They were powered by steam in the early years and air compressors in the later years.



After 1923 lightships also aided the mariner with a device called the radio beacon. A radio beacon emitted a Morse code signal that other vessels with receivers could “pick up” to obtain a bearing on the lightship. This bearing, coupled with a radio beacon bearing from another source (lighthouse) provided the receiving ship with a rough “fix” of its position. WLV 605 had all three aids to navigation, and as RELIEF she showed the light, fog signal and radio beacon characteristics of the station she was temporarily occupying. As an example: when she was on the SAN FRANCISCO station her light characteristic was flashing white every 15 seconds, the fog signal one blast every 30 seconds and the radiobeacon emitted two dashes (Morse code signal for “M”).

Lightships were equipped with a unique “mushroom” anchor which extended from the very bow of the ship, rather than from the side of the bow as with most ships.



Lightship anchors, which do resemble mushrooms, weighed up to 7,500 pounds. They were secured to the ship by large (1-3/4” diameter) Di-Lok chain, each link weighing about fourteen pounds. Usually lightships let out five to seven times as much chain as the depth of water in which they were stationed, although in heavy seas or during gales and hurricanes extra chain was let out. The San Francisco lightship was anchored in 100 feet of water and typically had 700 feet of chain out.

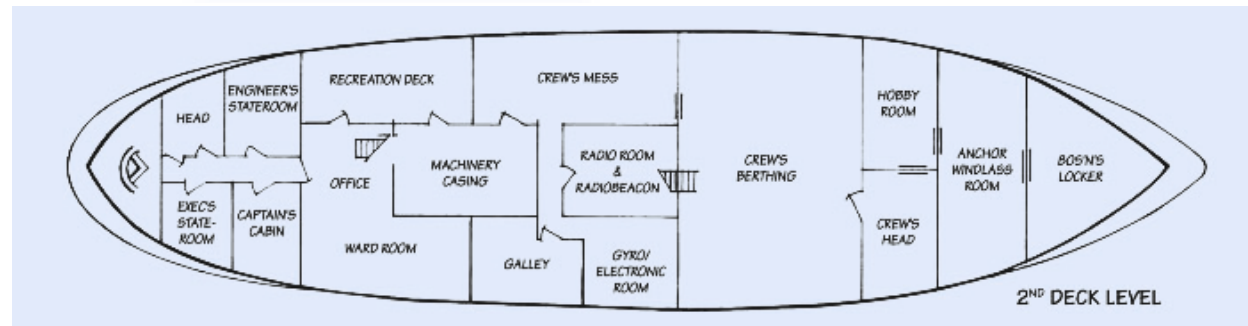
Lightship crews could vary in size depending on the lightship, location of the station and era. Generally a lightship crew ranged from 12 to 18 with two-



THE HISTORY OF WLV 605

WLV 605, one of six lightships constructed for the Coast Guard, was built by the Rice Brothers Shipyard in Boothbay, ME. She was commissioned on 15 February 1951 as OVERFALLS a lightship station off Delaware. In 1960 she was transferred to the BLUNTS (reef) station off Cape Mendocino, CA and then in 1969 she became RELIEF, relieving all west coast lightships when they left station for overhaul. The ship was decommissioned by the Coast Guard in 1975 and given to the City of Olympia, WA in 1976. Olympia was unsuccessful in making the ship a museum and sold the vessel to Mr. Alan Hosking of Woodside, CA in 1979, and he in turn donated the ship to the U. S. Lighthouse Society on 31 December 1986.

thirds of the crew on board at any one time. District buoy tenders visited lightships, generally every other week, to provide the ship with food, mail, water and fuel and to transfer crew members back from leave and some of those aboard to shore. In recent years, under the Coast Guard, a Chief Warrant Officer served as Commanding Officer. The rest of the crew was enlisted with a Chief Boatswain’s Mate acting as the Executive Officer and a Chief Machinist’s Mate as Engineering Officer.



WELCOME ABOARD!

FORMER U. S. COAST GUARD LIGHTSHIP WLV 605



LIGHTSHIP WLV 605

VITAL STATISTICS

Length	128 feet
Beam	30 feet
Draft	11 feet
Displacement	617 tons
Speed	11.5 knots
Range	22,000 miles
Fuel Capacity	49,496 gallons
Water Capacity	13,028 gallons
Crew:	1 Chief Warrant Officer 18 enlisted

Propulsion:

Atlas Imperial 8-cylinder diesel
550 horsepower; single screw

WLV 605 served on these stations:

OVERFALLS (DE) 1951-1960
BLUNTS (Reef) (CA) 1960-1969
RELIEF (west coast) 1969-1975

Berthed at:
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Oakland, California

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