

## U.S. Coast Guard Diving Program

*A History of Coast Guard Diving Operations  
COTP, San Francisco*



By Robert Wert

Edited by Scott Price

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### **Editor's Note**

The following information and photographs were provided by Coast Guard Diver and veteran Bob Wert. In his article he describes his tour while stationed at COTP San Francisco from May, 1958 until May, 1961, during the height of the Cold War. He noted that there were two other divers there for a short time that he did not mention in the main text of his article: DC3 Charles Pierce and DC3 Ed Hanson. Although he wrote that he was “never sure” if the service had divers in any other location, such a program had existed during World War II. In fact, the Coast Guard had trained “frogmen” with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II in teams referred to as Operational Swimmer Groups. But the program lapsed at the end of the war with the rapid demobilization that consequently occurred. For more information on this pioneering effort see Michael Bennett’s website “Guardian Spies” at [guardianspies.com](http://guardianspies.com). Although they were not the first, Petty Officer Wert records an important milestone in Coast Guard history—the development of a permanent dive program for the service.

We would like to thank Petty Officer Wert for taking the time to preserve this little-known aspect of Coast Guard history.

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*Robert Wert:*

*The United States Coast Guard initiated a permanent diving program in San Francisco because of the Cold War. We were never sure if the Coast Guard had divers in any other locations at this time.*

*[Note: Coast Guardsmen were trained with the OSS as frogmen during World War II.]*

*Any vessel in a Communist port or carrying Communist cargo was inspected in the first U.S. port it visited by the Coast Guard and Customs. Divers were instructed to search the hull for anything suspicious or radioactive. Because of an incident in Portsmouth, England (conduct an internet search for Lionel "Buster" Crabb") all hull searches were called off. Instead of abandoning the diving program, it was decided to have divers perform underwater maintenance and repair. This included changing propellers and making any other repairs to keep from having vessel haul-outs to commercial yards. The Twelfth Coast Guard District did not have any government service yards. All haul-outs were done at commercial yards, including those for the weather patrol cutters.*

*Our other duties included the recovery of buoy and anchor chains and locating and recovering sunken aircraft and boats. The Divers at Captain of the Port [COTP] San Francisco when I came aboard were:*

- Bill Edison, DC1*
- Holstrum, GM1 (I don't remember his first name)*
- Marvin Larson, DC3*
- Robert Wert, SN*

*We were all graduates of the U.S. Naval Underwater Swimmers School in Key West, Florida. Our unit developed a gear (screw or propeller) puller and a hydraulic ram to change damaged propellers on Port Security Unit 40 footers. On one occasion, with two 40-footers, side-by-side, we changed all four propellers in eleven minutes. This amounted to a savings of \$125 per boat, the fee that would have been charged by a commercial boat yard for hauling the boats.*

*On another occasion we made a cofferdam for the sea chest on the CGC Taney or CGC Dexter (I'm not sure which one it was). We thought it would be a "put it on, take it off job" but we were told it would need to stay on overnight. The cofferdam was made out of ¾ inch ply, lined with gasket material and attached with J-bolts to the grid. That dam was all that was holding back the sea water from sinking the 300-plus foot cutter. As it turned out, it was needed for two days (which gave us some concern), and there was very little seepage. When we removed the cofferdam, the cutter's CO said "we'll keep it in case we need it again."*

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Photographs:



*Photo #1: My graduating class from U.S. Naval Underwater Swimmers School at Key West, Florida. I am in the first row, far right.*



*Photo #2: The equipment we used. We used "dry suits" since "wet suits" were no in common use yet. The long-handled underwear, two sets for each diver, was not so much for warmth as it was to keep one's skin from being squeezed in the folds when the air was purged from the suit.*



*Photo #3: The diving dress. Marv Larson is on the left, Bill Edison is in the middle, and I am on the right.*



*Photo #4: The diving dress. Marv Larson is on the left, Bill Edison is in the middle, and I am on the right.*



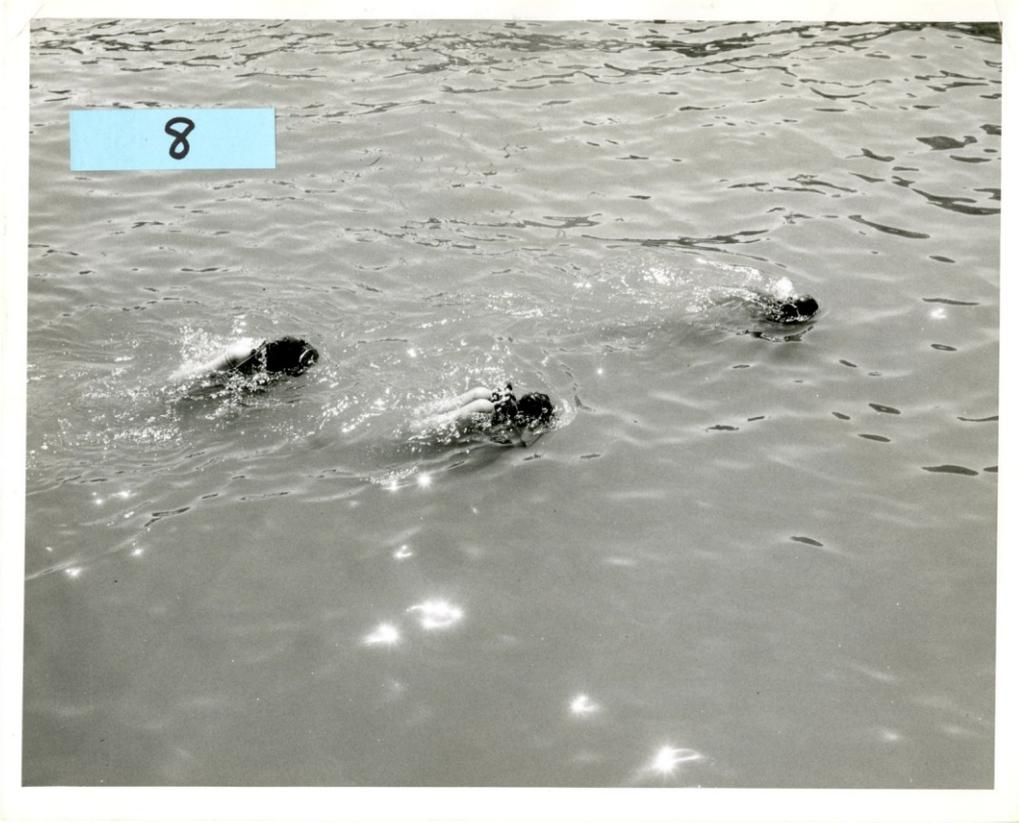
*Photo #5: The diving dress. Marv Larson is on the left, Bill Edison is in the middle, and I am on the right.*



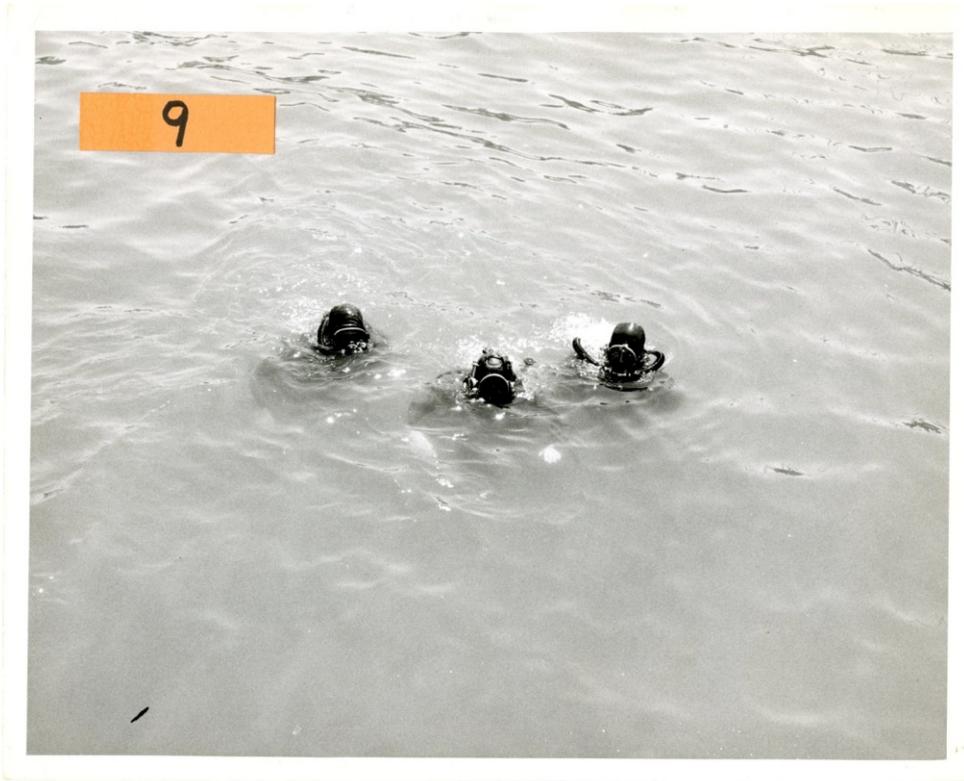
*Photo #6: The diving dress. Marv Larson is on the left, Bill Edison is in the middle, and I am on the right.*



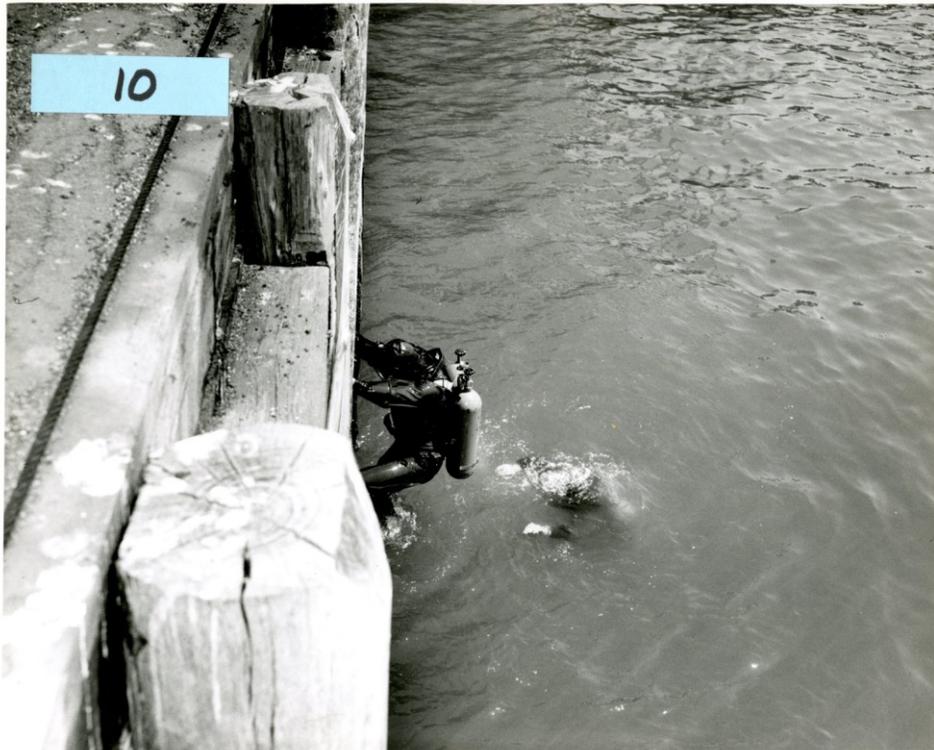
*Photo #7: Divers entering the water. The building in the background was COTP San Francisco. The building is no longer there.*



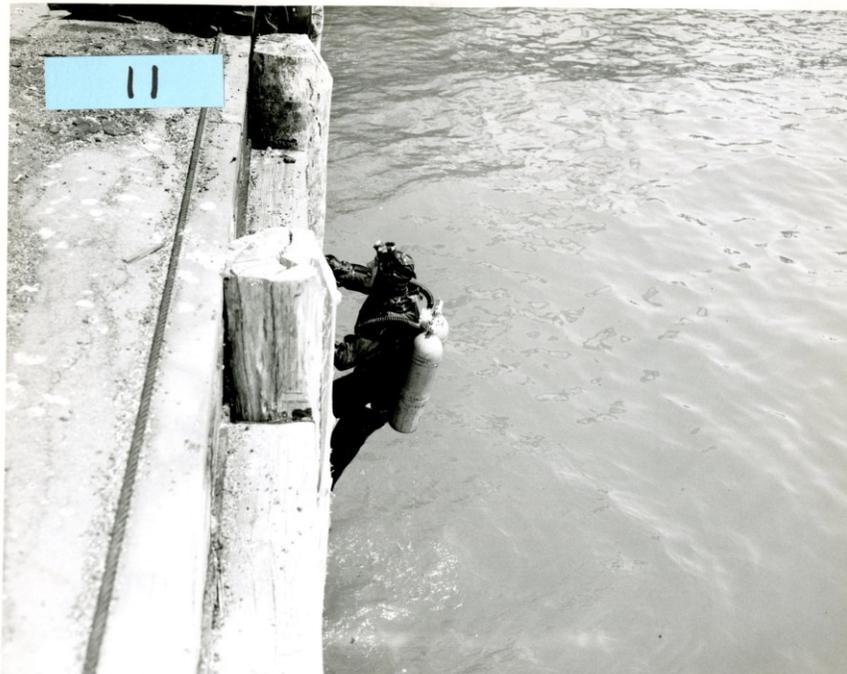
*Photo #8: The three of us in the water.*



*Photo #8: The three of us in the water.*



*Photo #10: Bill Edison coming out of the water.*



*Photo #11: Me and Bob Wert coming out of the water.*



*Photo #12: Marv Larson and me performing a helicopter pickup. This was a demonstration for the Coast Guard Auxiliary and Power Squadron.*



*Photo #13: Marv Larson and me performing a helicopter pickup. This was a demonstration for the Coast Guard Auxiliary and Power Squadron.*



*Photo #14: Marv Larson and me performing a helicopter pickup. This was a demonstration for the Coast Guard Auxiliary and Power Squadron.*

The following is a copy of the U.S. Naval Underwater Swimmers School instructions, which were received on the first day.

U.S. NAVAL SCHOOL  
UNDERWATER SWIMMERS  
U.S. NAVAL STATION  
KEY WEST, FLORIDA

USNSUSINST 1540.1  
WHH:ps  
27 January 1958

USNSUS INSTRUCTION 1540.1

From: Commanding Officer  
To: DISTRIBUTION LIST

Subj: Student Grading System

Ref: (a) U. S. NAVAL SCHOOL UNDERWATER SWIMMERS INSTRUCTION 5420.1

Encl: (1) Category Grading System

1. Purpose. The purpose of this instruction is to establish a uniform student grading system for the course of instruction conducted by this command.

2. Background. The need for a uniform student grading system in any course of instruction is obvious. In order for the student to be evaluated in accordance with his true abilities and for him to have opportunity to observe his own standing and progress in the course it is necessary to have a fair and representative grading system. Such a system must be made known to the student at the time he commences the course and changes in the system that could adversely affect the results achieved by any student must not be made during the course.

3. General. The course of instruction conducted by this command is divided into three principal categories; academic, practical, and suitability and general attitude. Discussion of these categories will follow in a succeeding paragraph. In general, passing grades must be maintained by each student in all categories and failures will be handled in a manner commensurate with the degree of the failure. Final action involving possible dismissal of any student from the course of instruction because of failure will be through a decision of the Commanding Officer. Recommendation for dismissal for Medical reasons is a function of the Medical Department, however, final action here also rests with the Commanding Officer. Students are encouraged to perform as well as possible in the course and final standings and class averages will be maintained.

4. Passing Grades. The minimum passing grade in the course of instruction at this command is as follows:

a. For any quiz, examination, subject, or category the minimum passing grade is 70%.

b. In the case of awarded re-examinations the minimum passing grade for the re-examination is 75%. In such a case the subject grade will be limited to the minimum passing grade of 70% regardless of the amount above the re-examination minimum passing grade achieved.

5. Grade Categories: Grade Categories, subjects, and weights are as indicated in enclosure (1). Grades will be maintained by the Training Department.

a. Academic - Students will be graded numerically from performance in written examinations. Graded quizzes may be used at the discretion of the Training Officer. However, the weight of such quizzes will be included in the overall weight of the subject or category as already assigned.

b. Practical - The practical grade is initially recorded as a multiple involving the many factors that are considered to be indicative of proficiency of performance in the particular practical work concerned. This multiple is converted into a scaled grade at the completion of all practical work required. This grade is, in turn, weighted and averaged with the academic and attitude grades as determined.

c. Suitability and attitude - This grade is a numerical grade determined at the end of the course or at any time during the course, if deemed appropriate by suitable authority, on the basis of Training Department observations of the particular student's suitability for ultimate assignment to diving duty. Thus if an instructor feels that a student is seriously deficient in or exhibits personality characteristics which would render him unsuitable for diving duty, he will advise the Training Officer immediately of this situation. The grade represents many factors such as ability to carry out orders, initiative, adaptability to difficult situations, ability to cooperate with and get along with fellow students and instructors, and general ability to perform divers tasks that may or may not be evaluated in other categories of the course.

6. Failure. Failures will be handled as follows:

a. In the case of initial examination failure with a grade of 60% to 70%, the Training Officer may at his own discretion administer an appropriate re-examination in accordance with the provisions discussed in paragraph (7) below.

b. In the case of initial examination failure with a grade below 60% or in cases where the Training Officer does not elect to administer a re-examination for a failure of 60% to 70%, the case must be forwarded to the Academic Board for recommendation of disposition to the Commanding Officer.

c. In the case of failure of any re-examination, the individual will automatically be referred to the Academic Board for recommendation of disposition to the Commanding Officer.

d. In the case of any student of questionable suitability or attitude status, a spot-check grade will be determined and if this grade falls within the limits as described above for failing academic grades, then appropriate similar action will be taken.

e. In the case of quiz failure, re-examination and Academic Board action are not required and the failing quiz grade will be entered as such into the record.

7. Re-examinations. The following procedure will be followed for re-examinations.

a. In cases of awarded re-examinations, students will take an alternate examination of the same type originally administered.

b. The re-examination will be conducted on a not-to-interfere basis after the student has had opportunity to prepare himself. Normally the preparation period will not exceed three school days.

8. Academic Board. The Training Officer will refer failing students as described above to the Academic Board for recommendation of disposition. The functions of the Academic Board are discussed in reference (a).

C. R. HIMAN

DISTRIBUTION:

List A, B, D.

AUTHENTICATED:

W. H. HAMILTON, JR.,  
Lieutenant, U. S. Navy  
Executive Officer

ENCLOSURE (1)

CATEGORY GRADING SYSTEM AT U/WSS

CATEGORY                      TYPE OF GRADE                      TOTAL AS % OF FINAL GRADE

ACADEMIC:

Medical Test	n	( $\frac{1}{2}$ of N)	
Demolition Test	n	( $\frac{1}{4}$ of N)	
<u>Final Test</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>(<math>\frac{1}{2}</math> of N)</u>	
<u>Total:</u>	<u>N</u>		<u>33 1/3%</u>

PLACTICAL:

500	Surface	None	
750	Surface	m	
1000	Surface	m	
500	Scott	None	
750	Scott	m	
1000	Scott	m	
750	Aqua	m	
1000	Aqua	m	
1500	Aqua	m	
750	R/S Aqua	m	
750	R/S Surface	m	
750	Northhill	m	
1000	Northhill	m	
1100	Pipe	None	
500	Surface Night	m	
1000	Surface Night	m	
500	Scuba Night	m	
1000	Scuba Night	m	
<u>Total:</u>		<u>M</u>	<u>33 1/3%</u>

Suitability and Attitude:

Attitude, cooperation, How student performs, etc.	S	<u>33 1/3%</u> <u>100</u>
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Remarks: n - numerical grade as a percentage of N  
 N - numerical grade  
 m - multiple which consists of total time of surface swims, or total time plus air consumption of SCUBA swims  
 M - total of m's; final swim mark is computed from M through the use of a key which is set up on a curve  
 S - subjective numerical grade of class proctor, training officer, and instructors

ENCLOSURE (1)

Estimated cost and savings brought about because of the Coast Guard's Diving Program (1956-1960):

ENCLOSURE (1)

ANNUAL DIVING STATISTICS

PSU, ALAMEDA			12th COAST GUARD DIST.			CG CUTTERS		
Date	Savings	Cost to COTP	Date	Savings	Cost to COTP	Date	Savings	Cost to COTP
1956								
4th Qtr.	\$865.00	\$138.20	4th Qtr.	\$50.00		4th Qtr.	\$50.00	
1957								
1st Qtr.	\$289.00	\$ 11.20	1st Qtr.	\$ 100.00				
2nd Qtr.	\$185.00	\$ 8.50	2nd Qtr.	\$ 100.00				
3rd Qtr.	\$150.00	\$ 33.00				3rd Qtr.	\$50.00	
4th Qtr.	\$818.00	\$ 27.65	4th Qtr.	\$2,566.00				
Totals	\$1,442.00	\$ 80.35		\$3,766.00			\$50.00	
1958								
1st Qtr.	\$585.00	\$ 29.75	1st Qtr.	\$350.00		1st Qtr.	\$ 90.00	
2nd Qtr.	\$705.00	\$ 43.40	2nd Qtr.	\$325.00		2nd Qtr.	\$ 50.00	
3rd Qtr.	\$775.00	\$ 40.10	3rd Qtr.	\$635.00		3rd Qtr.	\$ 175.00	
4th Qtr.	\$880.00	\$ 64.08	4th Qtr.	\$000.00		4th Qtr.	\$1,050.00	
Totals	\$2,945.00	\$177.33		\$1,310.00			\$1,365.00	
1959								
1st Qtr.	\$1,090.00	\$ 36.62	1st Qtr.	\$332.50		1st Qtr.	\$300.00	
2nd Qtr.	\$ 712.50	\$ 44.65	2nd Qtr.	\$325.00		2nd Qtr.	\$150.00	
3rd Qtr.	\$ 440.00	\$ 35.50	3rd Qtr.	\$625.00		3rd Qtr.	\$200.00	
4th Qtr.	\$ 865.00	\$30.45	4th Qtr.	\$300.00		4th Qtr.	\$100.00	
Totals	\$3,107.50	\$147.22		\$1,582.50			\$750.00	
1960								
1st Qtr.	\$ 945.00	\$ 27.65	1st Qtr.	\$ 275.00		1st Qtr.	\$ 225.00	
2nd Qtr.	\$ 755.00	\$ 33.40	2nd Qtr.	\$2,054.00		2nd Qtr.	\$ 550.00	
3rd Qtr.	\$ 593.00	\$ 36.06	3rd Qtr.	\$ 475.00		3rd Qtr.	\$ 150.00	
4th Qtr.	\$1,390.00	\$ 36.40	4th Qtr.	\$ 250.00		4th Qtr.	\$ 350.00	
Totals	\$3,683.00	\$153.51		\$3,054.50			\$1,275.00	
<b>GRAND TOTAL:</b>			<b>SAVINGS</b>			<b>COST TO COTP</b>		
			\$25,295.50			\$696.61		

COMPILATION (1956 through 1960)

NUMBER OF DIVES: 304  
 ESTIMATED SAVINGS: \$25,295.50  
 COST TO CCGD12 FOR SUITS AND EQUIPMENT: \$2,274.47  
 COST TO COTP FOR AIR AND UPKEEP: \$696.61

# U.S. NAVAL SCHOOL UNDERWATER SWIMMERS

U.S. Naval Station  
Key West, Florida



Know ye all men by these presents that WERT, R.S. SA USCG

has, on this 2<sup>nd</sup> day of MAY, 1958, satisfactorily completed the

required course in underwater swimming, employing self-contained breathing apparatus,

at this command and is qualified for duty as a U. S. Navy Underwater Swimmer.

*R. A. Enders*  
R. A. ENDERS, LTJG. USNR  
Training Officer

*C. R. Hinman*  
C. R. HINMAN, LCDR. USN  
Commanding Officer

Letter of Commendation:

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

ADDRESS REPLY TO  
Commanding Officer  
USCGC TANNEY (WPG-37)  
Government Island  
Alameda, California



F15  
22 April 1960

From: Commanding Officer, USCGC TANNEY (WPG-37)  
To: Captain of the Port, San Francisco, California

Subj: Divers attached to Captain of the Port, San Francisco; ap-  
preciation for the services of

1. TANNEY's records reveal four specific instances during the past two years where the CGTF Divers have been of great assistance. On three of the four occasions, it would probably have been necessary to drydock the vessel in order to effect the proper repairs. Specifically, the assistance they rendered is as follows:

- a. Blocked off the opening for the sword of the Pitometer Log to permit proper repair. This opening is in the bottom plating.
- b. Plugged the overboard discharge nipple for the Boiler Bottom Blow sea valve. The existing valve had a bad leak and re-  
newal was necessary.
- c. Made an inspection of the damaged starboard propeller.
- d. Plugged the Dynamo overboard discharge pipe to permit a  
welded repair. Water was entering the hull through this con-  
nection and a proper repair could only be done with the as-  
sistance of the Divers.

2. On the last visit, the men involved were Charles A. PIERCE, DG3(DV), Robert S. WERT, SN(DV) and William E. EDISON, DC1(DV). EDISON and WERT have helped us on several other instances.

3. The appreciation of the TANNEY is hereby tendered to Captain of the Port, San Francisco for the assistance of the Divers attached to your command.

F. V. HELMER

Copy to:  
CCGDL2(e)  
CCGDL2(o)

MAILED 12 APR 1960