

TOP SECRET UMBRA
A Sailor's Recollections of USNS MULLER (T-AG-171)
by
Charles L. Cragin

Fifty-seven years ago on April 23, 1963, USNS Sergeant Joseph E. Muller (T-AG-171) departed the Higgens Shipyard near New Orleans, transited the last 100-mile portion of the Mississippi River, and entered the Gulf of Mexico en route to U.S. Naval Station Key West, Florida. However, its journey as USNS MULLER had begun over a year earlier. While my personal recollections are anecdotal, much of the information concerning MULLER and its operational activities has been gleaned from a now declassified but substantially redacted, formerly TOP SECRET UMBRA ("Most Sensitive Material,") "Review of The Technical Research Ship Program" (hereinafter "The Review") conducted under the auspices of the National Security Agency, dated May 1, 1970.¹

The purpose of "The Review" was "to provide a ready reference for those involved in the future planning for, and conduct of operations by, dedicated seaborne surface SIGINT [Signals Intelligence] collection platforms."² The Preface of "The Review" acknowledged that "[d]uring the period 1961-1969 inclusive, a number of dedicated seaborne surface platforms, generally referred to as technical research ships, conducted SIGINT collection under the control of the National Security Agency. These ships supported the national SIGINT effort by operating in navigable international waters, primarily providing coverage in coastal area [sic], on targets not otherwise accessible to collection resources."³ "These ships [T-AGs], with a maximum operating speed of 10-11 knots, were not capable of quick reaction or shadowing missions but were well suited for sustained in-depth coverage of a limited area...."⁴

In response to a directive issued by the secretary of defense in "early 1962" an agency of the government, presumably the National Security Agency, developed "a two-phased program for submission to the Assistant Secretary of Defense and arranged for the charter and conversion of a ship through the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS)."⁵ "In August 1962, COMSTS advised that the USNS MULLER had been selected for reoutfitting and by September alteration procedures had begun."⁶

MULLER had begun its career on December 30, 1944 when its keel was laid down as "M/V Check Knot", A Maritime Commission type (C1-M-AV1) hull at Southeastern Shipbuilding

¹ A Review Of The Technical Research Ship Program 1961 – 1969, Prepared by Miss Julie Alger, May 1970, National Security Agency, portions declassified from TOPS SECRET UMBRA, hereinafter referred to as "The Review".

² Ibid. at Preface, paragraph 4

³ Ibid. at Preface, paragraph 1

⁴ Ibid. at page 6, paragraph 3

⁵ Ibid. at page 79, paragraph 1

⁶ Ibid. at page 79, paragraph 2

Corporation in Savannah, Ga. A single diesel engine of 1,700 horsepower was designed to propel the 338.5-foot ship at a maximum speed of 11.5 knots. It was launched on February 17, 1945, and after spending an operational year, was placed in the Defense Reserve Fleet in November 1946. In 1948 it was withdrawn from the Reserve Fleet and transferred to the U.S. Army Transportation Services whereupon it was renamed and commissioned as the "USAT Sgt Joseph E Muller. Sergeant Muller was killed in action on Okinawa in 1945 and was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. Two years later the ship was transferred to the U.S. Navy and placed in service as the "USNS Sgt Joseph E. Muller (T-APC-118). The ship participated in numerous campaigns during the Korean War and earned nine battle stars.

It was returned to the Reserve Fleet in 1957 until it was reacquired by the U.S. Navy on September 20, 1962 and began its relationship with the National Security Agency and the U.S. Naval Security Group (NAVSECGRU). Following its acquisition by the Navy and MSTS it was converted to a "*Miscellaneous Auxiliary (Technical Research Ship)*." Reactivation and conversion took place at Maryland Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, in Baltimore, Maryland in October 1962. On 30 October it was reinstated on the Navy list as USNS Sgt. Joseph E. Muller (T-AG-171).⁷ Shortly thereafter, the ship was towed to the Higgens Shipyard near New Orleans for further alterations.⁸ The cost of conversion is reported as \$1,891,000.⁹

Following completion of "R" and "T" branch "A" schools at the Naval Communications Training Center at Corry Field in Pensacola, Florida, in December 1962 I was transferred to the NAVSECGRU Activity at the National Security Agency located at Fort Meade, Md. I was advised that I would undertake training as a "Signals Research Technician" and, at the completion of my training, would be assigned duties "at a detachment in Turkey." While at Corry Field one of my "T" branch instructors was CT1 Don East.¹⁰ We became lifetime friends and Don became a legend in the Navy Intel community. He retired as a captain in 1992 and enjoyed many years of retirement in Lineville, Ala., until his death on March 9, 2016.

At some time in February 1963 I was advised by someone at the NAVSECGRU that my orders were being changed and I would be going to USNS MULLER in New Orleans. That was a name I had never heard of, but I had done some research on the Turkey assignment and felt comforted with the Navy's decision. Shortly thereafter, I was on my way to New Orleans and my introduction to MULLER. The ship was in a shipyard in New Orleans undergoing a major refit of its interior spaces and no one was living aboard. The ship's crew consisting of 11 officers and 48 "enlisted" were civilians employed by the MSTS. They were under the command of the "Master" of the ship, Capt. William F. O'Reilly. They would operate and maintain the ship and provide food services to all aboard. The military personnel embarked were designated the "Research Operations Detachment" that was comprised of four officers

⁷ Naval History and Heritage Command, www.history.navy.mil Sgt. Joseph E. Muller, paragraph 5, hereinafter NHHC

⁸⁸ Ibid at paragraph 5

⁹ "The Review" at page 12

¹⁰ For an excellent biography on Captain Don C. East, USN (Ret.) see CRYPTOLOG, Summer 2012, pp. 14-15, U.S. Naval Cryptologic Veterans Association (NCVA)

and 90 enlisted personnel. The Det. was commanded by Lt. Cmdr. George D. Stein, Jr., USN. From my vantage point as a CT3 way down the food chain, Cmdr. Stein impressed me as a tall, lanky officer who brought to his job an organized manner and exhibited, on rare occasions, a wry sense of humor. He retired from the Navy as a captain and passed away in 2003. I recall running into Capt. Stein in the Pentagon years later after I had been commissioned for several years. He wryly commented: "Well Cragin, I knew we'd either have to commission you or take you to court martial". By the end of these recollections you may appreciate his point of view.

While MULLER was being made habitable the Det. was billeted at Camp Leroy Johnson, which had originally been an Army Air Base. Located on the south shore of Lake Ponchartrain, in 1963 it was home to the 522nd Barge Amphibious Resupply, Cargo (BARC) Heavy Boat Platoon, an Army organization composed primarily, if not exclusively, of African Americans. You can imagine the looks we got in the chow hall the first few days when this unit of primarily Caucasian men in white sailor uniforms descended on the camp. The Det. departed the camp early in April 1963 and took up berthing on MULLER. The camp closed permanently in 1964. While my recollection is that I did not arrive in New Orleans and at Camp Leroy Johnson until sometime in late February or early March of 1963, my shipmate CTM3 Jack H. Clark in online commentary has said: "I was the absolute first person to report for duty aboard the Muller, in February of 1962, before the ship's refit program was started. I was originally stationed at Camp Leroy Johnson (Army base) in New Orleans where I awaited the arrival of the rest of the crew."¹¹ While I don't recall whether Jack was the "absolute first person" to arrive on scene, I have no reason to doubt his assertion, particularly since he was an "M" brancher and one of those responsible for the installation of our operating equipment. However, I do think his typewriter finger may have slipped when he typed the date "February of 1962". After all he was a "Mat Man" not an "R" brancher. I assume he meant February of 1963 because MULLER was not selected for conversion until August of 1962.

While billeted at the camp we would be transported each day to the ship for our duties. However, our time in New Orleans was not all work and no play. Many of us became so recognizable at our Bourbon Street haunts that we were greeted by bartenders and piano players by our first names. The ladies at the dueling pianos at Pat O'Brien's still evoke fond memories. During this time, the shipyard personnel were converting much of the ship's inner spaces to living and operating areas for the Det. The deck immediately below the weather deck contained the mess hall and galley, berthing quarters, showers and heads, and a large open space in the fo'c'sle used by Det. members as their multi-purpose room. The deck below contained the operational spaces. Because the Det's operating equipment required cooling, all the Det's spaces, including berthing, were air conditioned. One cynic observed that it was "not to cool the crew, but the gear." It didn't matter to me; it was welcomed regardless of motive.

¹¹ www.navycthistory.com/usns_muller_jack_clark01.html

The port side of the Det's spaces, beginning one deck down from the weather deck, were occupied by berthing compartments for E-6 and below. Chiefs and officers were assigned staterooms on the starboard side of the ship. As one of the junior enlisted crew members I was assigned a bunk and locker in the "54-man compartment". By shipboard standards of that day, very spacious! Bunks were installed 4-high and I was pleased with my top bunk. While it was a bit of a gymnastic exercise getting out in the middle of the night in the glow of red night-lights, it was a lot better than getting feet in your bunk or face at all hours of the day or night. We tried to aggregate the three "watch" sections into specific areas of the compartment in order to reduce the confusion of comings and goings. It worked better in concept. There were separate berthing compartments for the E-6s and the E-5s. Each man was assigned a locker. These were not any "ship's locker"- they were 7-feet high and at least 24-inches wide. They provided ample space for military as well as civilian attire. Other storage space was made available in storage compartments below the berthing deck.

The Det's only secure access and egress to and from its spaces was from a ladder from the weather deck. In the event of an emergency there was an egress through the galley into "ship's company" areas. The Det's operations spaces were on the deck-level below the living spaces also reached by a single ladder. Just outside the security door of the spaces was a large coffee pot that was never permitted to run dry. We had an evaporator on the ship designed to turn sea water into fresh water. It was not 100 percent effective. After 14 months of drinking salty coffee, it took me sometime to acclimate to the freshwater coffee of NACSECGRUACTY Winter Harbor, Maine.

As I mentioned, Det. members moved from the camp and onto the ship in early April. By this time, we were being joined by Army "shipmates" from Army Security Agency stations, Vint Hill Farms, Va., and Two Rock Ranch, Calif. Many were Spanish speaking SIGINT operators. Activities kicked into a frantic pace as April elapsed. Any further installations requiring shipyard personnel were completed, stores were taken aboard, and preparations were made to get underway. On April 23, 1963 MULLER cast off her lines, was towed out of her shipyard slip into the Mississippi River, and began for me a 14-month long experience during which I developed lifelong friends, learned about myself, the technical aspects of my job and how to cohabit in very close quarters with a multitude of personalities.

I will always remember the transit down the Mississippi River. We got underway with our detachment and its officer complement headed by Lt. Cmdr. Stein. Our Operations Officer was Army Capt. Lawrence Moberly, who had come aboard shortly before we got underway. As we were cruising down the Mississippi, Capt. Moberly, allegedly without authority from Cmdr. Stein or the Ship's Master, Capt. O'Reilly, hoisted a large Confederate flag from a signal halyard above the bridge. There it remained for all to see until it was seen by someone in authority. I have always believed that Capt. O'Reilly ordered its immediate removal and, perhaps implicitly, the departure of Capt. Moberly.

I recall spending much of the Mississippi transit with other "juniors" stowing equipment and material in a cavernous hold. While it was hot in the hold, the movement of the ship was

almost relaxing. That is, until we hit the sea swells as we began our entry into the Gulf of Mexico. It was my first bout of sea sickness and, to my memory, it was indescribably BAD! A civilian in the crew suggested peanut butter on Saltines as the antidote and it has worked wondrously ever since.

A couple of days later we arrived at U.S. Naval Station Key West, Fla., where we took on “sensitive” supplies, topped off our water tanks, and set out for our operating area. “The Review” reports that “on 30 April the ship, [subsequent material redacted].” However, on the next page appears an un-redacted picture of the map of Cuba, which is where MULLER took up station for its “First Deployment April 1963 – April 1964”.¹²

Because Cuba claimed a 6-mile territorial sea and declared that distance as the “closest point of approach [CPA] a ship may make to the foreign landmass, and is measured from the coastal baseline of the country in question”¹³, MULLER operated outside that CPA and customarily steamed on a 6-mile track parallel to the coast with its center being off Havana’s historic landmark, Castillo de los Tres Reyes Magos del Morro. Those of us on the MULLER who looked at it on the horizon just called it: Morro Castle. “The major reason for this particular spot was a multi-channel UHF national communication system that RCA had installed. It ran from Havanna [sic], east and west, along the spine of the island and connected Havanna [sic] with each city in the country.”¹⁴ Our arrival on station caused some consternation in the neighborhood. We were overflowed regularly by Cuban reconnaissance aircraft and visited by Cuban patrol craft.

Except for exigent circumstances, MULLER maintained an operating ratio of no more than 25 days at sea followed by 5 days at its “home port” of Port Everglades (Fort Lauderdale), Fla. The OPTEMPO was primarily driven by MSTs that subdivided the at-sea period as: “1 day en route from Port Everglades to station; 9 days on-station (ninth day for visit at Key West Buoy for mail etc.; 4 days on-station; 1 day to Key West for water and return to station; 9 days on-station; 1 day return to Port Everglades. The 5 days in Port Everglades included the day of arrival and day of departure.”¹⁵ Water day in Key West gave most of the Det. an opportunity to spend a few hours ashore.

The Det. crew settled into an operational routine. There were three “duty sections” of operators who worked on a regimen of “three Eves, three Days, three Mids.” Junior enlisted assigned to Eve watches were responsible for “field-daying” the spaces and maintaining the cleanliness of the living quarters. I took particular pride in my “head cleaning” prowess and worked hard to ensure that the marble deck of the “head” glistened. I would scrub it carefully and then wash it down with the sea water hose. On one occasion I found some sort of granular chemical whose abrasive qualities seemed to do well on cleaning the marble. Things

¹² “The Review” at pp. 80-82

¹³ Ibid. at “CPA Restrictions” p. 113 at para. 1

¹⁴ “USNS Joseph E. Muller, TAG-171” by Bill Baer WVBAer@aol.com, www.asalives.org/ASAONLINE/baero1.htm at p. 2, hereinafter BAER

¹⁵ “The Review” at p. 103

went well until I applied the sea water to the chemical. A noxious, perhaps toxic, gas permeated the head and was immediately sucked into the air conditioning system. The Det. had to evacuate topside. I was counselled. So much for initiative.

In June we learned that our “OPS” Capt. Moberly was being replaced by another Army Capt., William V. Baer, Jr. Capt. Moberly had not been a favorite of the crew. Despite laundry facilities on board, he persisted in recycling his khaki uniform. A pool developed wagering on how many days the same uniform would show up in the OPS spaces. Each day someone would brush up to the captain and place a line mark on his rear pocket. I don’t recall the total amount of marks, but it was impressive. We bid Capt. Moberly farewell and welcomed Capt. Baer aboard when we arrived at Port Everglades for our port call. (Capt. Baer published his recollections of his tour on MULLER on www.asalives.org).

When we arrived in Port Everglades several of us took a tour of the port and Fort Lauderdale in a tour boat. As we cruised through the port our tour guide pointed out the “newly arrived USNS MULLER, an electronics intelligence ship.” I spoke to him and told him that I was a member of MULLER’s crew and that it was an “oceanographic research ship”, which was our “cover”. His response was classic: “Sonny, I’m a retired Chief Radarman. The only way that ship is oceanographic is if you tip it upside down and put all those antennas in the water.” So much for the cover story that persists today on the Naval History and Heritage Command site where MULLER is characterized as “a special project ship for oceanographic research operations.”¹⁶

Fort Lauderdale was a great home port. It was a tourist town with great beaches and many bars. It also had many young women. What a combination! One event was particularly memorable. I was standing a quarterdeck watch while we were in port and Steve Lair, one of our Army mates, came by the ship to pick up something. He was accompanied by a young woman to whom I was introduced. Before Steve left the ship, I had managed to get her to agree to a date the next time we arrived in port. We were married in 1965 and during our 25-year marriage became the parents of three lovely and talented daughters.

As an unarmed “merchant” ship we were particularly vulnerable to hostile actions and from time to time we encountered harassing activities by Cuban patrol craft. As Capt. Baer recalled: “One of the tasks the military department had was defense of the ship. We only had a selection of small arms including M-1 rifles, carbines, shotguns, etc. We took this responsibility very seriously because we knew the Cubans knew who we were, and they used to do things to harass us. We used to have weapon familiarization on the fantail of the ship and decided, the NSG [Naval Security Group] sailors should not be part of the defense force. They were not at all familiar with the weapons we had and in fact, were intimidated by them.”¹⁷ Because of our unique capabilities we were able to receive advance warning of planned hostile activity. On one occasion several Cuban patrol craft, perhaps Komar missile

¹⁶ NHHC at para. 5

¹⁷ BAER at p. 2, para. 2

boats, were preparing to depart Havana Harbor with the expressed purpose of capturing MULLER and taking it into the harbor. As soon as the boats cleared the harbor and began their approach on MULLER U.S. Navy fighter aircraft from Florida came in fast and low over the boats. They immediately came about and headed back to the harbor.¹⁸

On an historical note, while, to my knowledge, we did not have regular protection the situation changed by 1966 when it was decided “to provide the ships with the protection they needed in order to carry out their operations without undo risks to the ships themselves. This was a command decision and took the form, in certain instances of armed escorts (usually DDs) and air cover.”¹⁹ In February of 1968, the Commander in Chief of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet (CINCLANTFLT) issued an Operational Order entitled “USNS MULLER PROTECTIVE OPERATIONS” which, in part, stated:

- (1) If for some reason MULLER is forced to enter [redacted] territorial waters, the commanding officer of the escort is authorized to pursue.
- (2) In the event of an engineering or other casualty to MULLER which causes the ship to drift into [redacted] territorial waters, every effort shall be made to tow the MULLER into international waters. The escort vessel, in any case, will remain with MULLER to provide protection in the event the MULLER drifts into [redacted] territorial waters.
- (3) In the event [redacted] forces are declared hostile...U.S. forces in self-defense, may deliver such fire and perform such tactics as are necessary to provide defense of MULLER as well as themselves, including firing into [redacted] territorial waters and airspace.²⁰

“The destroyer escort assigned to the MULLER normally maintained a loose patrol 4-8 miles outboard of the ship.... In addition to the destroyer, fighter aircraft, as made available to COMKWESTFOR, were put on alert. These aircraft were expected to be on station approximately 10 minutes after call and had an estimated stay time of approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes.”²¹

The safety of MULLER and its people were always a concern but, to my knowledge, any time the ship was threatened there was an appropriate response from U.S. military officials. We were also always on guard that we would not be lured into some form of diplomatic trap. From time to time the ship would be approached by small boats with people purporting to be seeking asylum. In most instances they were rebuffed. However, I do recall one instance when a group of people in a small cabin cruiser came near MULLER insisting they were refugees. Their boat came right alongside the ship and, ultimately, with some of our folks

¹⁸ Years later I was talking with my friend, Royce P. Davis, Jr. R.P. recalled that during his tenure as a RIO in VF-31 he flew “assist” missions over the MULLER.

¹⁹ “The Review” at p. 117, para. 3

²⁰ Ibid. at p. 118, para. 1

²¹ Ibid. at p. 118, paras. 2, 3

brandishing weapons, the group was brought aboard and taken into the deck house for interrogation. Our seniors were trying to determine if this was a ruse or a legitimate request for asylum. While this interrogation was ongoing the cabin cruiser was being towed alongside the ship. Even though MULLER was probably only making 6 knots, it was too much for the boat that was being pounded on MULLER's hull. We watched as it disintegrated and sank. The group was determined to be legitimate refugees. The Coast Guard was contacted and rendezvoused with MULLER to transfer them.

Capt. Baer, in his recollections, observed that "[t]he food on this ship was wonderful. I have never eaten so well in the military since. When we went into port for a few days at Christmas, the chef asked me how I had liked the food. I jokingly replied that we did not have lobster with the prime rib for Sunday dinner. When I returned, we started having lobster."²² However, there was an event that impacted on the extensive menu selections. One of the MSTs crew fell ill with what our "Doc", HMC C.L. Taylor, Jr., determined to be a heart attack that, regrettably, took his life. While the ship arranged the transfer of his body it had to be stored somewhere. Apparently without consulting the MSTs galley staff the body, encased in a body bag, was placed in the galley reefer on top of pallets of fresh fruits and vegetables. Our menu selection was reduced until the Navy sent a Sikorsky H-3 to transport the body. Kudos to those Naval aviators who hovered above MULLER's fo'c'sle. One misstep and the helicopter would have become ensnared in an antenna array.

The Det. members went to great lengths to avoid monotony. There were the typical mission assignments for "newbies". Seabats, Fallopien tubes, and ST One's come to mind. Sunbathing consumed many off-duty daylight hours. The deck above the deckhouse sported "cruise ship" wooden deck chairs that were scooped on a first come, first served basis. The one drawback was that as the ship reached the end of its track and turned 180 degrees it reoriented the shade of the antenna array forcing the sunbather to reposition his chair. I came up with a different approach. While in port I purchased two fold-up aluminum beach lounges, which I stored in my locker. I also had a large Zenith Trans-Oceanic shortwave radio. The ideal place to sunbathe was on the fo'c'sle deck. However, the heat of the sun's rays on the steel deck was a deterrent. I solved the problem by renting the deck chairs as well as my radio as accompanying entertainment. My foray into entrepreneurship was doing well until it wasn't. Cmdr. Stein determined that private businesses were not going to be permitted to flourish. My radio went into my locker and the chairs went over the side.

The fo'c'sle was the Det's recreation room. Poker and games of Hearts, Bridge and Whist were on-going many hours each day by men enjoying their non-watchstanding hours. Each evening a movie was shown. "They usually were bad, but most everybody went."²³ Because the ship had no cargo or ballast in the lower holds, the ship rode about 8 feet lower in the stern. Fo'c'sle occupants had to acclimate to the movements of the bow depending upon the sea state. Reading was a great hobby for many. Someone introduced me to an author named

²² BAER at p. 1, para. 4

²³ Ibid. at p. 2, para. 2

Ian Fleming and a book named *Casino Royale*. I read all the James Bond books published at the time finishing up with *On Her Majesty's Service*. John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* got my attention, which whet my appetite for more Steinbeck such as *East of Eden* and *The Grapes of Wrath*.

MULLER's bow rode high and in rough weather became a sail, particularly when it was making a 180 degree turn on its six-mile track. "In the event of the threat of extreme weather conditions, the MULLER would normally head for Port Everglades and ride out the storm in port....Additionally, 7 knots (speed of ship) was insufficient to maintain a heading against the heavy wind and seas which normally extend far beyond the actual eye of the storm."²⁴ For some reason the ship's Master, Capt. O'Reilly, had misjudged or been misinformed about the path and dimensions of Hurricane Flora that visited Cuba a couple of times in early October 1963. The forward velocity of the storm greatly exceeded MULLER's top speed but, for the most part, the ship stayed on track. First the bow would come high out of the water, slam down into a trough, and then the stern would rise so high that the propeller was completely out of the water. The seas were wild for about a week. "Everything loose was put away and people slept strapped to their bunks. A lot of people got seasick during that week."²⁵ It was like riding a bucking bull, but you couldn't get off. I celebrated my 20th birthday riding out Flora, eating peanut butter and Saltines.

During the cruise I had decided to finish up my enlistment and enter college in preparation for going to law school. I had enjoyed high school, but it was more about the social life and less about the academics. While the GI Bill offered some tuition assistance, I would need good scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) to counteract my mediocre high school record. Thus, I began a daily regimen of vocabulary enhancement. Each day I would select several words that I would employ in conversations during the day. In about a year I had worked my way through SAT primers and had, at least to some extent, become somewhat obnoxious in my interjection of the polysyllabic into general conversations. One day it brought Chief Paul to observe: "Watch out, Cragin is working on J words!" The ominous day arrived, and I entered the deckhouse that served as a meeting room. At 0900 Philadelphia time my monitor handed me a test booklet and pencils, started the timer, said "good luck" and left the room. My SAT exam had begun.

Sadness also came to the ship. Because of our technical equipment we were able to monitor high speed radioteletype newswires that on November 22, 1963 reported the news that President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated in Dallas. While the grief was palpable among the crew, we also had other considerations. We were an unarmed SIGINT ship six miles off the Cuban coast conducting intelligence operations. We thought the world as we knew it was coming to an end. While our seniors communicated with higher authority, we continued our operations. Soon, we moved further offshore to await further guidance.

²⁴ "The Review" at p. 104, para. 4

²⁵ BAER at p. 2, para. 3

We were scheduled for our first yard period in early April 1964 but had to remain on station a couple of weeks longer while awaiting our replacement. I do not specifically recall which SIGINT ship was assigned but remember that it encountered several problems which delayed its arrival on station. Finally, "on 21 April 1964 the ship sailed to Tampa, Fla. to undergo its first annual overhaul."²⁶ While the ship was in drydock the Det. lived aboard and did maintenance work, particularly in its secure spaces. The ship's hull was scraped, and work was done on its rudder and notorious bent propeller shaft. The yard period gave the crew an opportunity to take in a different flavor of Florida, particularly the Ybor city area of Tampa. It was not in Havana but in Ybor city that I was introduced to Cuban eateries and fine cigars.

We left the Tampa shipyard on 19 May and returned to our normal routine with our 5-day visits to Port Everglades. On the last day of our visit in May, the Det's crew was mustered on the pier in our whites and Cmdr. Stein was reviewing his detachment. I suddenly felt this sharp pain in my abdomen and doubled over. I was taken aboard to "Doc" Taylor's dispensary and, after a short examination including pain inducing pressure on my abdomen, Chief Taylor pronounced that I had "acute appendicitis" and needed to go to the hospital. However, I couldn't go to any civilian hospital in Fort Lauderdale. Instead, I was transported down the coast and through Miami to Homestead Air Force Base where I was summarily dropped off at the door of the hospital's Emergency Room. Still wearing my white uniform, I entered the ER and was asked what I wanted. I told the receptionist that I was sent from my ship and that I had been diagnosed with acute appendicitis. I was told to have a seat and wait. It felt like an interminable period until a man in a white coat approached and asked me why I was there. I told him my story and it was like a light switch had been thrown. With a bevy of activity, I was placed on a gurney, wheeled into a room and prepared for surgery. Within hours I was in a hospital bed without an appendix or pain.

Two days later I was released from the hospital and driven to a Greyhound bus station where I took a bus to U.S. Naval Station Key West. On my second day in the barracks I was driven to a tugboat in the harbor and advised that I would meet MULLER at the Key West sea buoy. We departed the pier and after a short transit arrived at the rendezvous point. The tug came alongside MULLER. My gear was hoisted on a line and then I climbed a rope ladder up the side of the ship to its deck. Many of my shipmates were assembled as a greeting committee. Army Spc. Larry G. Falkner stepped forward and gave me what I recall as more than a gentle punch in my stomach. I doubled over in pain and almost lost it on the quarterdeck!

We had a great group of enlisted guys who were smart and enjoyed their assignments. Each watch period was also a learning opportunity under the tutelage of great mentors. I was blessed to learn not only the technical aspects of my job but given the daily opportunity to observe leadership in action. To this day I think warmly of the positive influence of Chiefs Ron Paul and Loyle Dozier, CT1 Ben Truitt and CT1 Dave Flynn. Over the years Ron Paul and Ben Truitt have become dear friends. We also keep in touch with some of our MULLER shipmates and friends including John Wayne Adams (Texas), Frank Simmons (Md.) and George Branfuhr

²⁶ "The Review" at p. 82, para. 2

(Ariz.). George came to Maine in 1964-65 to visit me while he was living in New Jersey and I introduced him to one of my friends. He moved to Maine, married my friend, worked for the Post Office, and then he and his wife retired to Arizona. We also miss Tony Novak (Texas) who passed away in 2016.

In January 1968 I was serving as a CTT1 in the Navy Reserve when USS Pueblo (AGER-2) was attacked and captured by North Korean forces. My heart went out to its crew and my CT compatriots. I also thought about how the Det. would have handled it if a similar situation had happened to MULLER. I didn't recall any "Destruct/Scuttle" drills on the ship and wondered if a protocol had existed in 1963-1964. "The Review" answered the question:

"With slight variation, the TRSs [Technical Research Ships] were equipped with the "VALDEZ Quick-Fix" type system for equipment/document destruction and scuttling....Prior to the deactivation of the TRSs, no incident occurred that warranted the use of these devices so to date the system has never been tested under actual conditions."²⁷

Comforting to know, even in retrospect.

Below is the roster of MULLER's Research Operations Detachment as of December 1963:²⁸

LCDR G. D. Stein, Jr. USN	Commanding Officer	
Capt. W. V. Baer, Jr. USA	Operations Officer	
LTJG R. C. Neapolitan, USN	Material/Supply Officer	
LTJG R. Bragonier, USNR	Communications Officer	
E-8	E-6s	E-5s
Haynes, J.R.	Flynn, D.A.	Allen, R. L.
	Griner, H. L.	Anderson, D. A.
E-7s	Hill, R.F.	Bennett, A. D.
Bowser, W.F.	Kirby, E.	Brahaney, J. T.
Burks, H. J., Jr.	Larkie, C. L.	Cote, C. J.
Dozier, L. B.	Lotz, R. E.	Descamps, R.
Paul, R.S.	MacInnis, J. B.	Firth, J. J.
Sawyer, A. H., Jr.	McBride, J. B., Jr.	Foster, D. A.
Taylor, C. L., Jr.	Meeks, J. L. R.	Fowler, H. H.
	Patterson, C. R.	Garney, E. B.
E-6s	Pinkerman, T. F.	Gilroy, H. M.
Adams, P.E.	Truitt, B.	Grinier, R. E.
Colley, J.H.	Walthers, P., Jr.	Hanes, E. R.
Corbin, R.W.		Hartfield, B. R.
Feigel, R. E.		Hoyt, S. C.

²⁷ Ibid. at p. 129, para. 2

²⁸ Derived from a holiday greeting card produced by the Detachment in December 1963

Santiago, J. F.

E-5s

**Mondulick, E.
Moyer, A. L.
Murray, L. G.
Novak, A. J.
Plitt, G. F., Jr.
Sites, O. A.
Veale, M. D.
Wallace, A. V., Jr.
Wedderburn, K. D.**

E-4s

**Adams, J. W.
Canaday, H. D.
Clark, J. H.
Cragin, C. L. III
Dixon, P. T.**

E-4s

**Falkner, L. G.
Holum, R. A.
Houck, J. K., Jr.
Ingmire, R. C.
Jontz, D. M.
McMillian, R. D.
Reeve, G. W.
Reiff, E. L.
Richardson, J.
Speck, J. L.
Stevens, J. H.
Trigo, G.
Westerfield, P.
Wood, H. E.**

Jimmerson, E. D.

E-3s

**Branfuhr, G. H.
Cochran, G.
Delgado, F. R.
Fukuchi, C. H.
Gates, J. G.
Hicks, J. J. J.
Jameson, J. W.
Knapick, C. R.
Kotch, A. A.
Lair, S. J.
Lotito, A.
Paul, D. N.
Richards, O. E.
Sannes, M. G.
Smith, J. L.**

About the Author

Charles L. Cragin served aboard the USNS MULLER from April 1963 until June of 1964. In 1991 he was appointed by President George H.W. Bush to serve as Chief Judge and Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals and was confirmed by the U.S. Senate. In 1997 he joined Secretary of Defense William Cohen as a senior official at the Pentagon. He retired as a captain from the Navy Reserve in 1998 upon assumption of the duties of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs. He completed his tenure at the Pentagon in June of 2001 as the Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. Cragin and his wife, Maureen, also a Navy captain, are retired and divide their time between homes in Maine and Santa Fe, New Mexico.