

LORAN Station decommissioned

By **SCOTT BOWLEN**
Daily News Staff Writer

The U.S. Coast Guard decommissioned its LORAN Station Shoal Cove on Tuesday morning during a sunlit outdoor ceremony at the remote site on Revillagigedo Island that had provided precision radio-navigation signals for more than 33 years.

The decommissioning is part of the nationwide shutdown of LORAN that began in February.

Located about 22 miles northeast of Ketchikan off of Carroll Inlet, LORAN Station Shoal Cove was one of the last stations in the United States to cease operations when it turned off the second of its two signals on Aug. 3.

Tuesday's ceremony was attended by the station's commanding officer and crew, crew family members, representatives of the various Coast Guard entities that are involved with LORAN, the U.S. Forest Service and others.

Coast Guard ETC Ray Fillion, the executive petty officer of LORAN Station Shoal Cove, served as the master of ceremony for the decommissioning ceremony.

As brilliant sunlight glinted off the wires attached to the station's four 700-foot-towers, Fillion introduced the ceremony's speakers.

Chaplain Jeff White of the Coast Guard Auxiliary in Ketchikan gave the invocation.

White was followed at the podium by Cdr. Randall Navarro, chief of the

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U.S. Coast Guard Cdr. Randall Navarro, at podium at right, addresses the audience at the decommissioning ceremony for Coast Guard LORAN Station Shoal Cove on Tuesday at the remote station near Carroll Inlet. Seated from right, are Cdr. James Boyer; CWO Greg Enters, and volunteer Chaplain Jeff White. Standing at left is ETC Ray Fillion.

Staff photo by Scott Bowlen

Coast Guard Navigation Center's Operations Division.

Navarro congratulated the personnel of LORAN Station Shoal Cove for more than 33 years of "outstanding dedication and service" in providing the navigation signals that have guided mariners and aviators in a harsh environment that spanned from the Gulf of Alaska to the Inside Passage.

LORAN Station Shoal Cove was part of two LORAN "chains."

Each LORAN chain provided low-frequency radio signals transmitted from at least three land-based sites. The signals can be interpreted by LORAN receivers aboard vessels and aircraft to determine their position.

Station Shoal Cove was part of the U.S. Gulf of Alaska chain that included stations in Tok, Port Clarence and Kodiak. It also was part of the Canadian West Coast Chain that included Canadian-operated stations at Willams Lake and Port Hardy, in addition to the U.S. operated station at George, Wash.

LORAN Station Shoal Cove has operated with a commanding officer and 16 enlisted personnel, all the while compiling an impressive record of on-air signal availability and precision.

"It's interesting to note that this has been accomplished by a remote LORAN station that has no commercial power — we run our own generators here — is still configured with the old tube-type transmitting technology and it's only accessible by a boat or an aircraft," Navarro said.

Cdr. James Boyer of the Coast Guard District 17 Port and Waterways noted that most crew members spend more than 250 days a year at the station, but "many of them still find the time to volunteer in local churches and the community."

Boyer and Navarro presented a Coast Guard Meritorious Unit Commendation to CWO Greg Enters, the commanding officer of LORAN Station Shoal Cove.

The commendation praised the Shoal Cove crew for achieving a 99.99 percent system availability in 2009, and a 100 percent availability in 2010.

Also noted was the crew's performance in the orderly termination of the station's two signals, and its coordination of the impending decommissioning of the station itself.

'We have been a truly great and remarkable unit.'

— Greg Enters,
Commanding officer

The station's crew also warranted high praise from Enters.

"In my view, we have been a truly great and remarkable unit," Enters said. "We may not have always been perfect, but we always strive for perfection."

He spoke about each individual crew member present, highlighting jobs strengths and interests, and noting where they would be stationed or going after leaving LORAN Station Shoal Cove.

Enters also said the crew members present Tuesday represented those who served before them at the station.

"You stand at the end of a 33-year line of over 250 shipmates who all have worked to keep a near-perfect LORAN signal going here at LORAN Station Shoal Cove.

Enters has been serving his second tour as commanding officer at Shoal Cove. His first tour was from 2000 to 2003.

He thanked his wife, Denise, for her support during his Coast Guard career to date.

Boyer presented a Coast Guard Commendation Medal to Enters for his outstanding achievement at LORAN Station Shoal Cove from June 1, 2009 through August of this year.

Earlier during the ceremony, Navarro and Boyer spoke of the history and development of LORAN.

Originating at MIT in 1941, LORAN was instrumental in assisting allied forces in the later stages of World War II.

Its use grew over the years as mariners and aviators came to rely on the radio signals that helped them navigate safely.

"In the last two decades, though, LORAN has been

overshadowed by the development of GPS," Boyer said.

With most navigational users now relying on the satellite-based global positioning system technology, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security decided in 2009 to close the LORAN system.

The signals involved in U.S. LORAN chains were shut down on Feb. 8. Signals involved with international chains were shut down earlier this month.

In recognizing LORAN Station Shoal Cove's contribution and the service of its crew members, Boyer said that "33 years of dedicated, continuous service cannot be recounted within a single day, or recounted in a single speech."

He thanked the crew, past and present, for their dedicated service.

"You have embodied the Coast Guard's core values of honor and respect and devotion to duty, and have made it possible to be Semper Paratus, always ready," Boyer said.

LORAN Station Shoal Cove was formally decommissioned at about 11:40 a.m.

"Commander, LORAN Station Shoal Cove is decommissioned," Enters said. "The watch is secure."

The station itself has changed noticeably in preparation for the decommissioning.

Equipment that once hummed with activity stood quiet. Some rooms already were cleared of furniture and fixtures.

Enters said the Coast Guard crew would be relieved by Sept. 13 by the contractors who will be securing the facility by the end of October.

"Hopefully, by November, it will be an unmanned facility," Enters said.

Regular security visits to the site continue, he said.

In other items of interest, Boyer and Enters on Tuesday thanked Bill Spencer, who has provided transportation under contract with the Coast Guard on the water link between Ketchikan and Shoal Cove for 10 years — an estimated 68,000 miles total so far — without ever missing a trip.

Also among those present Tuesday was Steve Beattie of Ketchikan. Beattie served for six years at LORAN Station Shoal Cove, including a tour as its commanding officer from 1991 to 1995.