

Profile of a ship  
and its crew

# USS Compass Island

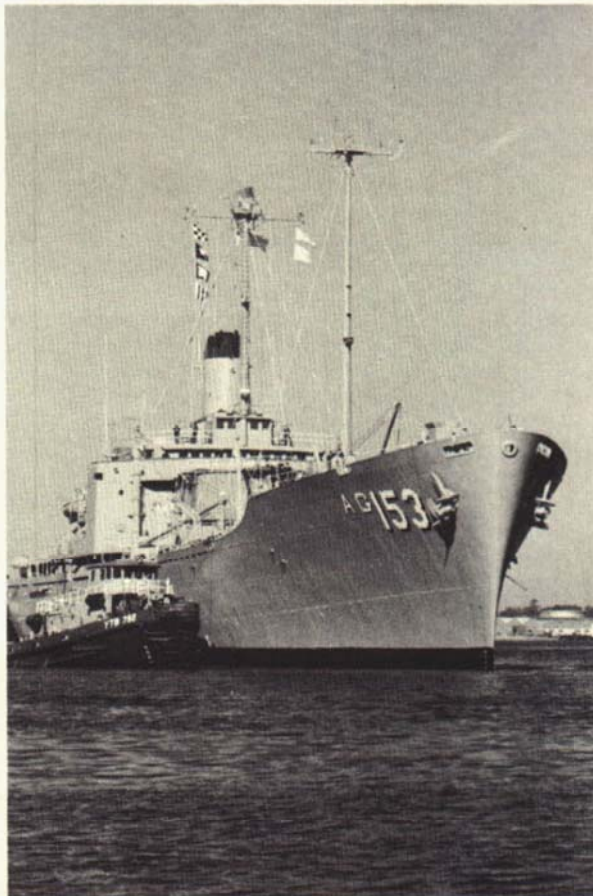
An AG? Other than Aerographer's Mate, what's an AG?

That was not an uncommon question around the Charleston Naval Base last summer. That's when USS *Compass Island* (AG 153) arrived in her new home port after 18 years operating from Brooklyn, N. Y.

The "CI" (as she's called by her crew), an experimental navigation ship, was first placed in service as a fast cargo merchant vessel. In December 1956, the Navy acquired the ship from the U. S. Maritime Administration after a decision that a fast "Mariner-class" hull would make the best test platform for precision navigation equipment being evaluated for Fleet use.

Only months after being commissioned, she was underway for tests to evaluate inertial navigation equipment for use in what was to become known as the *Polaris* program. In the 1960s, the ship played a key role in the development of *Poseidon*. Currently, she's at sea conducting navigation equipment tests for the

Below left: USS *Compass Island* (AG 153). Center top: CDR Jim Mace, commanding officer. Center bottom: LCDR Jim Howell, special projects department head. Right: ET1 Frank Bannon compares calibration data with ET1 Wayne Danner. Facing page left: ETN2 Randy Downs checks out equipment with aid of ET1 Wayne Danner and ETN2 Frank Moscato. Facing page top to bottom: Launching magnetometer sensor. Civilian engineers at work in ship's Data Analysis Center. ET1 Rick Drown watches ETN2 Kenny Knowles review Navigation Aids Division's test assignments for the day. ETN2 Rick Hawthorne checks out a printed circuit board for breaks.



SSPO in support of the *Trident* system.

During her conversion, *Compass Island* was specially equipped with roll-stabilizer fins (when similar ships are rolling 20 degrees, in the same seaway *Compass Island* will roll only about two degrees).

The ship is 564 feet long and carries a crew of 15 officers and 225 enlisted men, many of whom are specially trained electronics technicians assigned to the ship's "Special Projects" Department. In addition to the Navy crew, *Compass Island* normally carries approximately 30 civilian engineers and technicians during at-sea periods. Normal operations consist of short but frequent deployments, usually to operating areas off the Atlantic coast.

For the men of *Compass Island*, Navy and civilian alike, deployments are periods of intensive data collection mixed with other periods when there is time in which to relax. On board, some almost-empty cargo holds have made possible a wide variety of recreational activities, including a full-court basketball gym, a weightlifting room, a band room, a library and a live ship's radio station.

A unique ship in many ways, *Compass Island* is proud of the role she has played in the development of the navigation system which is so important to our strategic missile submarine force.

—Story by LTJG James Bullock  
—Photos by PH2 Robert Holzhauser

