



Dale Arlen Nelson

1954-1956 & 1958-1960

By: Edrie Vinson

Most of what we know of Dale Nelson comes from his photographs and from his letters to his wife. When he first arrived in the winter of 1954, he described the island to Darlene this way:

The island is big. It takes about 4 hours to walk around it. It's mostly woods that have never been touched. It's really beautiful. There is a little island right next to ours, it's called Little Patos. Between us is a cove where we tie our boats up. There are two other couples living here. They both have little kids, about 18 to 20 months old. They all seem very nice. The living quarters consist of a duplex and one house. We'd live in one side of the duplex which

has 3 bedrooms, kitchen, living room, dining room, utility room and bathroom with a tub...

Dale had Christmas dinner with the Officer in Charge, John Wiechert and his wife Marcie. And soon he earned a great reputation among all of his new cohorts, one for which we are grateful to this day:

We really had some excitement here today. This morning I had the 6 to noon watch and at eight I went down to secure the light. As I opened the door to the tower, all I could see was smoke, so I turned on the fire alarm and tried to find the fire. It was up on the roof and had burned into the attic. We put it out in about a half hour. It

left a big hole in the roof. I put a temporary patch on it for now. I guess if I hadn't gone into the tower the whole damn building would have burned down in a few more minutes....We think it was a spark from the generators exhaust.

Thankfully they got the fire out in time to save the lighthouse. But another fire during his tenure there was intentional, and it was the destruction of the 1893 Keeper's Residence. His photographs give graphic evidence of its poor condition, as well as the building of a new tri-plex to move the families into before it was burned.

The light station changed in many ways while the Nelsons, now with a daughter, Dawn, and a son, David, lived there. The post WWII years saw improvements in transportation, among them a pick-up truck on the island, helicopters bringing in people and supplies, additional housing, updated equipment in the lighthouse, generators and new radio equipment. All of these were a result of the technology increase during the war effort. The brightest minds the country had to offer came to her aid in time of war, and the new knowledge and capability set the stage for upgrades in Aids to Navigation at Patos and other light stations around the country.



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