

No return address was provided, to the best of our recollection, and there was no way for us to reply to the man who had become practically our favorite seaman.

And then we heard no more from — or of — Roy Shackley. It was with genuine pleasure that we came upon the name in the current Yankee, with its strong implication that the old pilot is still in good shape.

There was a time, in the closing years of the 1930s and the very beginning of the forties, when we used to take the boat to Provincetown and back every Tuesday, which happened to be one of our days off. That was the S.S. Steel Pier, and although we never took to it quite as warmly as we had to its predecessor, the S.S. Dorothy Bradford (of senior-class trip memories that bless and burn), we liked it better by far than any of its numerous successors.

Admiration of the Pilot

And a lot of our warm feeling for the old ship was wrapped up in our admiration of the pilot, Roy Shackley.

We didn't know him as a captain then, although he may well have had his master's certificate. We just don't remember. The captain of the Steel Pier then, at least for most of the time we knew her, was a tall, lean, handsome man, Capt. Gordon Keating.

The Steel Pier may have been only an excursion boat, plying a placid route across Massachusetts Bay twice a day, but we never once saw Captain Keating out of his uniform jacket or without his gold-braided cap.

He also belonged to the Naval Reserve — and the fearful forties had scarcely begun before he was called up to more exacting and undoubtedly more exciting duty. We don't know what became of him, but we hope HE is still around, too — somewhere.

A Bit More Informal

Shackley, on the other hand, was a bit more informal in both his attire and his attitude, and the Steel Pier would not be long away from her Atlantic Avenue wharf before we could look up and see him leaning out of one of the pilot-house windows, hatless, in shirt sleeves. When he spotted us, there was nearly always a friendly wave that beckoned us to come up for some conversation. He knew we were a newspaperman, and it always was a source of wonder to us that he seemed to look upon our job as being as colorful and romantic as we considered his.

He was a tall man, exceeding even our own six feet four inches, and heavily built. He had a lot of hair, on the light side, and a mustache of modest size.

He was fond of showing us newspaper stories about himself, pasted in a scrapbook, which described him as "The World's Most Tattooed Seaman."

All Parts of the World

Most of the stories were accompanied by photographs to back up that title, which they did most convincingly. He had apparently picked up body art in practically all parts of the world.

It seems curious now, as we look back, that in all the time we spent in his company, even when the Steel Pier was well out in open water and his piloting duties were not exactly pressing, he never once offered to show us any of this remarkable art work that he carried around on his epidermis.

We could, of course, see what was plainly apparent on the backs of his hands and on his brawny forearms, but for the rest the newspaper pictures had to suffice.

It seemed to be an incongruous streak of shyness in the man, but we were well aware of it and had sense enough never to press him.

There was, as we recall, no shyness at all in his use of a remarkable vocabulary.

With Deep Feeling

Normally genial and easy-going, as big men, conscious of their power, frequently are, his nature would undergo a temporary but striking change whenever some amateur mariner in a small boat would seem on the verge of violating the rules of the nautical road and threatening both his own craft and the orderly passage of the Steel Pier. Then Shackley would move, with surprising swiftness for one so large, to the cord that touched off the ship's whistle — and he would speak with deep feeling. He knew some truly beautiful words and phrases, of rare force and pungency. We remember making a few professional notes, but they have long since disappeared.

He remains in our memory as very much a part of that pleasant interim period, before the madness of war interfered with the comings and goings of purely "fun" boats; when the white steamers of the Eastern Steamship Lines could still be seen heading for the Canal and New York as the Steel Pier churned back toward Boston, with the sun dipping toward the Custom House and other towers of the city — and when somebody ALWAYS seemed to play Glenn Miller's "Sunrise Serenade" on the juke box as the ship came by the bay.

As we said, we're glad to learn that Roy Shackley is still among the living. We can't imagine what he's doing in a place as landlocked as Farmington, Maine.

But, now that we know where he is, we're certainly going to try to find out.