CAPTAIN OF THE LINE

An interview with Captain John S. Tucker

By Larry Driscoll

All illustrations from the collection of Captain John S. Tucker unless noted otherwise

Captain John S. Tucker on the bridge of the liner *United States* during an Atlantic crossing sometime between 1967 and 1969.

On July 7, 1952, the American luxury liner *United States* sailed into nautical history by decisively winning the "Blue Riband", the coveted prize for speed on the North Atlantic. A beautiful, sleek luxury liner with destroyer-like speed, she sailed with 1,660 passengers from New York to Bishops Rock, England in three days, ten hours and forty minutes, cutting the *Queen Mary's* fourteen-year-old record by nine hours and 36 minutes. The new liner was the pride and joy of her owners, the United States Lines Company, and evidence of that was very visible in the bold type at the bottom of the souvenir abstract of the ship's log provided to passengers:

> "These passages are world records. It is the first time in a century that an American ship has captured the blue Ribbon of the North Atlantic. The United States Lines is rightfully proud of the achievement. We believe you are too".

My search for information on this historic voyage, the company and people who made it possible led me to John Tucker, retired captain for the United States Lines. He was there at the beginning as a deck officer for the acceptance trials and maiden voyage. In the 1960s he would serve as captain and in the end he kept the lights burning while the ship was laid up in Newport News.

The captain and his wife Penny live on a lake in the remote back country of Western Maine. "I married a local girl who could not wait to get out of a small town," he said. They are now both back in town, having left the New York area to settle in a comfortable frame house set behind pine trees and down the road from the grandchildren.