

BRIDGE DELIGHTS 'SEASIDE SUPERS': They Gather Daily to Watch Building of Narrows Span

By GAY TALESE

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The New York Times (by Patrick A. Burns)

BRIDGING THE GAP: Girder forming midsection being hoisted on Verrazano Bridge

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The iron workers moved like high-wire walkers between the towers, singing and whistling 400 feet in the sky. Below, 200 seaside superintendents watched from the Brooklyn shoreline, and one of them said: "What a day—what a beautiful day for bridge-building."

The Verrazano-Narrows Bridge is nearly three-quarters done—it should open in November—but almost every day there is a sense of rejuvenated drama around the bridge, and the superintendents, mostly elderly men with plenty of time to spare, never tire of the show.

They squint into the sky, and sometimes shudder, as the iron workers swing casually across the cables. And they discuss, without fatigue, the techniques of bridge building, often critically. They also wait with anticipation each morning for the arrival of the barges toting the 400-ton, box-shaped chunks of steel that will be hoisted 200 feet, and later clamped onto the span to form the deck.

"Here she comes," one of the superintendents, a retired engineer, said yesterday at 11 A.M., peering through his binoculars.

Links Assembled in Bayonne

The barge floated slowly toward them, completing its five-mile journey from Bayonne, N. J., where the American Bridge Division of United States Steel Corporation assembles the 40-ton links and loads them onto the barges.

Sixty of these links, when joined, will form the 6,690-foot span between Brooklyn and Staten Island.

The hoisting of these gigantic blocks is one of the most complex—and dangerous—phases of bridge-building. And perhaps it is the anticipation of danger, as well as pure admiration for the art itself, that lures the seaside superintendents to the Brooklyn shores each working day.

Yesterday, after the barge had come to a stop under the span, an assistant ironworker—a chunky man equipped with a loudspeaker, and looking like Federico Fellini—stepped forward on the barge and proceeded to give directions.

"Okay," he blared out, holding to his lips his bright yellow horn, "easy now, let's move it easy."

His voice could be heard hundreds of feet away, and his directions were transmitted by a "signal man" who straddled the catwalk between the towers to two engineers who operated the two hoisting machines on the tower. The signal man had a telephone, and the two engineers had head sets.

All three of them, plus a hundred men, were more than 200 feet away from him. Still, the communications system worked perfectly, and soon the 400-ton steel box began to edge slowly off the barge and rise above the sea.

"Look at 'er go!" cried a seaside super, gazing up at the steel that, 15 minutes later, had climbed 100 feet. In another 15 minutes it had reached the span, and the hands of the iron workers were tugging at it, and later helping guide it into its locking position.