

What issh yah?

One of my first assignments upon reporting to the Public Health Service in 1960 was to assist in an environmental study. The fate of compounds that might contain radioactive elements was fairly well known in fresh water and in salt water environments, but where the two ecosystems meet in the brackish water of estuaries, much confusion reigned. In order to study this situation and to measure any possible contamination from the Atomic Energy's Savannah River plant a study was designed and labeled Savannah Estuary Environmental Study (SEERS).

The basic plan was to collect, identify and study soil, sediment, water and biota samples throughout the Savannah River estuary. Samples were processed and shipped to the Southeastern Radiological Health Laboratory in Montgomery, Alabama, for analysis, primarily for radioactivity. The study was a joint study with the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. The Coast Guard assisted in providing some of their utility boats for water and bottom sediment sampling and for catching any free floating organisms, primarily fish.

On one trip we were collecting sediment (mud) and plant samples on a tidal flat surrounding a very small island. We were taking a lunch break under one of the small trees at the high spot on the island. One of our party was a local black man hired as a laborer to assist us. The lead project officer for the program was Commander Julius J. Sabo who claimed his home state to be Idaho. As we were eating our lunch the laborer, Sam, asked "CDR Sabo, what issh yah?" CDR Sabo was taken aback by the question and asked: what do you mean Sam? Sam replied, Yah issh not a Yankee, and yah issh not a Southerner, what issh yah?" CDR Sabo replied "I am a westerner." As we continued our lunch, Sam replied, "I like westerners!"

--- Fred Rueter ---