

VWOA NEWSLETTER

Email Issue #13

2006



Reminiscing about the United States Coast Guard ships and men that served on them by Richard A. Perkins WA7SNY

He states in his note to VWOA:

“This article was written by me in 2001 and published in the SOWP Quarterly. Some VWOA Members might find it interesting to see OBS msgs from a coasties view.”

Richard 73



USCGC MATAGORDA WAVP-373 Ocean Station Victor



Richard A. Perkins WA7SNY



Domain of the Golden Dragon-Date Line 1961



Age 19 -- Heading for Yokosuka, Japan 1961

USCG Ocean Stations

By Richard A. Perkins WA7SNY

With the expansion of civil aviation after World War II, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) asked for a system of weather observation stations. In 1946, a network of 13 Ocean Weather Stations in the North Atlantic was proposed by ICAO. Later Ocean Stations were established in the Pacific.

The primary functions for these observation stations were to provide up to date weather information, navigational aids for aircraft, and to serve as a base for Search and Rescue Operations. The US, Canada and eight European nations would be responsible for their operation.

Each station was referred to by a letter eg: B, C, D, or E for some of the Atlantic weather stations and N, S, or V for those in the Pacific. There were others that were manned by both foreign countries and us. On some Ocean Stations observations were made of water temperature, salinity and oxygen content at standard depths.

As a Radioman aboard the USCGC Bering Strait (WAVP-382), I was part of a team that successfully tracked WX balloons, put encrypted information into numbered code groups and relayed this to USCG radio station NMO in Honolulu.

In general, the main components of a weather ship operation, other than the crew necessary to keep the vessel in operation were: civilian Weather Bureau personnel, CIC (radar gang), those on duty on the bridge and the radio operators.

Weather personnel would launch the balloons, record the transmitted information and encode it into a standard format weather message. Those on the bridge were responsible for keeping the ship on a heading that would allow for good radar contact and still not beat the ship to pieces. I'll not forget the announcements "prepare for coming about". That usually meant 'hold on to your coffee cup'.

The CIC (Combat Information Center) guys had the task of tracking the balloon as long as possible on the Air Search radar. Another job was to provide aircraft passing within range, their track, ground speed and any other information requested.

All radio traffic was in the CW mode. Most of it was weather information, but we did have our share of routine operational messages. The Ocean Station Ships, in addition to collecting weather information, also relayed weather observer messages sent to us by MM operators. These OBS were sent to NMO.

To put a little fun into what could become a daily repetitive routine the Radiomen had a contest during each patrol. The operator who handled the most OBS messages during the 21 days on station would be rewarded with a beverage of choice while in Japan. The competition at times involved some skill in deception. One practice was to call a well-known Navy radio station, that also accepted and relayed weather observer messages on the 500 KC calling frequency and request the operator to QSY to a working frequency. That would allow our operator to remain on 500 KC and QSY to a working frequency. That would also allow our operator to remain on 500 KC and QSY the MM op to another frequency.

One way to "UP THE COUNT".

In the period from 1960-62 the weather station workhorses were the 311' and 255'

cutters. The four ships based in Honolulu at that time were the Bering Strait and Matagord (311's) and the 255's Chautauqua and Winnebago. I never went to sea on a 255, but my understanding is that they gave one a rougher ride than the 311's. Former 255 sailors tend to be a proud bunch and seemed to have a closeness that I have not observed among the crews of the larger ships. Perhaps that is why there is now a 255 Sailor Association, but nothing similar for the WAVP's.

A typical patrol had us leave the USCG base at Sand Island, Honolulu harbor and steam for seven days to relieve the ship on Ocean Station Victor (34N 164E). That ship would head to Yokosuka, Japan for two weeks R&R. After our 21 days on station the JA ship would return so that we could experience the delicacies of that country. In two weeks we would go back to OSV, relieve the ship on station (now homeward bound) and spend another 21 days as 4YV. When another cutter out of Honolulu relieved us we were no longer 4YV and assumed the ship's call NBYG.

As a young single man, I did not mind being at sea. Yes, there were the four ON and eight OFF watches with numerous drills during the OFF time, but one tends to remember the enjoyable moments. When weather permitted, there was skeet shooting off the fantail, volleyball (enclosed in a net and line) and the occasional barbecue. During one patrol some

of the guys customized small model cars and had a destruction derby on the Mess Deck. By the end of the patrol these cars were nothing more than melted plastic and lead on wheels. Unless a wheel was damaged, the car was as likely to damage the ship than another car.

With the dawn of satellites, the Ocean Station System went the way of CW. It was a time when the job was done, most likely quite efficiently, with the tools at hand.

I am proud to have been a small part of this program and would repeat the experience if the clock could be turned back. I'm still a CW operator as amateur station WA7SNY. My opinion is that, in spite of modern technology, there will always be those who are attracted to that which is unique. CW will/has faded, but will most likely not die.

Memories of Richard A. Perkins WA7SNY

Visit the URL at <http://www.comm-one.org/> and see what is happening on the West Coast in the COAST GUARD C W Operators Association

VWOA MEMBER NEWS

We sadly report that we have received notice recently of the following SK VWOA Member:

WALTER SCHEFFE W2LPA
SK 12/12/2005

VISIT www.VWOA.org on the internet!!!
Doug Stivison our 2nd Vice President and Web Master of the VWOA Site has recently put the SPARKS AT SEA presentation by VWOA former 1st Vice President Miles D. MacMahon PhD available for ADOBE READER PDF file download and viewing. It is a great Wireless History Lesson to be shared with your friends and Grandchildren.

OUR WEB MASTER, DOUG STIVISON NR1A RECEIVED THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE AND RECOMMENDS THAT YOU VISIT THE INDICATED URL SITES:

From: Tom McKee
[mailto:mckeetajc@earthlink.net]
Sent: Sunday, February 12, 2006 11:20 PM
To: stivison@vwoa.org; wenben@nyc.rr.com
Subject: Inland Marine Radio History Archive

Gentlemen,
One of your members, Ted Phelps - W8TP, recently informed me about your organization, and after visiting your web site I find that we have somewhat common interests.

I am attempting to document the history of the

public coastal stations that served the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River system. Take a look at www.imradioha.org for more information. Don't miss the great pictures of WUG-2 in the 1920s (www.imradioha.org/WUG2.htm), and WMI in the 30s -50s (www.imradioha.org/WMI.htm). Note that the small pictures are often hot links to bigger versions.

Some publicity for the project in your news letter might cause a few more veteran ops who served on the inland waters to contact me (like Ted did), and thus further the project.

A link exchange might be beneficial to both organizations.

I hope that you will look favorably on these suggestions, and that I will hear from you soon. 73 Tom McKee K4ZAD

From: Herb Perkins WA2JRV
To: 71147.1437@att.net
Sent: Wednesday, February 08, 2006 9:56 AM

Subject: Re: The Twelfth Edition of the VWOA Email Newsletter

I was overjoyed to read this last newsletter and found the writing style, content and topic to all be excellent. While I always enjoy the newsletter, I have found these stories to be

particularly interesting as they provide a glimpse of history that will, regrettably, soon be lost. I would strongly encourage all the members of VWOA to take a few moments to reflect on their professional lives and write down these valuable memories so that posterity can gain from their experiences. I would also encourage the members to contribute to the Veterans History Project at the library of Congress.

<http://www.loc.gov/vets/>

This is a project to collect from war veterans their stories, letters, recording and photographs of the war as they lived it.
73's Herb Perkins WA2JRV Dallas

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We at the VWOA Newsletter would like to hear from you and try to pass along to the rest of the VWOA stories of events that you have experienced and that you feel the rest of the membership would enjoy hearing about. Send us a picture or two and we will try to include it in one of our Email Newsletters.

We would prefer to hear from you by Email at:
71147.1437@att.net

Or
wenben@nyc.rr.com

but if you must, send mail to:

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