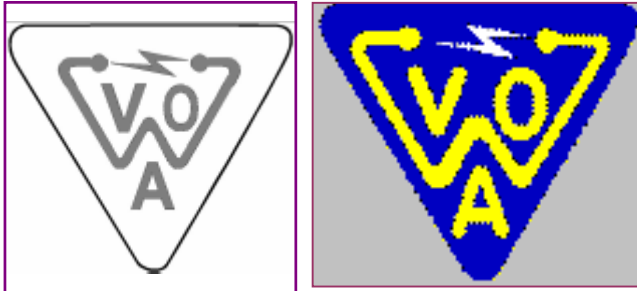


VWOA NEWSLETTER

Email Issue #15

2006



Herbert R. Perkins WA2JRV in correspondence with Wendell R. Benson on the subject of WLO, offered to write for the VWOA Newsletter a paper on WLO and its under-reported participation in the Katrina Hurricane.

Mobile Marine Radio "WLO" is the USA's only full service provider of voice, data and e-mail services to ships at sea.

Founded in 1947, WLO has been in continuous operation for over 55 years, serving the commercial, military and recreational marine industry.

Ideally situated on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, the WLO signal can be received over most of the globe.



Herbert R. Perkins WA2JRV



Operating Position at WLO



Wing of WLO TX building & Antenna Field

The Story of WLO and Hurricane Katrina in Mobile and New Orleans by VWOA Member Herbert R. Perkins WA2IRV

As professional communicators, I believe it is a safe assumption that each of us, over our working career, has at one time or another been involved in or at least listened to, emergency communications of some type.

While we all have responded differently to the information we have heard, each of us has had a very clear understanding of the tension and stress that the individual operator at the other end of the circuit is going through.

The story of WLO, a call sign that is likely very familiar to most of us, has gone largely unreported and unrecognized to the general public. Their reaction to a real communications need during Katrina is the stuff that makes each of us proud to do what we all do. They got a radio station on the air and worked tirelessly for over 12 days to relay traffic for the Coast Guard and others associated with the relief and rescue efforts in New Orleans.

Their story starts just after Hurricane Katrina passed Mobile and New Orleans and the damage assessments were conducted. WLO had suffered a great deal. Their transmitter site had part of the roof destroyed and as

would be expected, many of their antennas were down. That was the bad news, but the good news was that much of the equipment, with a considerable effort, could be made operational and many of the antennas that survived could be patched to working transmitters.

There was additional good news. The generator for the transmitter site was operational and had about seven days of fuel. Additionally, the generator for the control site was also operational and also had seven days of fuel

The three men responsible for making the station operational were **Rene Stiegler, the owner of WLO, Mike Ramage, Senior Operator and Engineer and Lyle Reisner, an Engineer.**

Lyle got transmitters on the air, patched antennas to them and started the generator.

Rene and Mike got the receiver site and main communications building working and soon WLO was back on the air.

At about this time, the Coast Guard called WLO to advise them that a major part of their operations center had been disabled because they had lost their roof. They had no working communications equipment because it was all flooded out. They did however, have power from their generator. Could WLO help?

Rene and Mike quickly put together a power supply, VHF, antenna and a marine band radio, which were taken to the Coast Guard Headquarters. With this equipment, the Coast Guard was back on the air, albeit with limited range. They could now talk with WLO, aircraft on the ground, and those close by who were in the air.

Within hours after the storm had passed, Coast Guard Headquarters in Mobile, ATC Mobile, Coast Guard Command Center in Alexandria, Louisiana and WLO were all working together to relay traffic from fixed and rotor aircraft involved in both the relief and rescue efforts. WLO used a patch panel, which they custom designed, to link HF and VHF radios so that aircraft in flight could speak directly with ATC Mobile and Coast Guard headquarters. Other HF circuits were set up with the NCS (National Communications System) SHARED RESOURCES (SHARES) High Frequency (HF) Radio network. WLO could now patch into and out of the SHARES network and allow Coast Guard assets interoperability with both aircraft in flight, as well as other facilities on landlines, UHF circuits, and VHF AM and FM circuits.

As the scope of the disaster began to be understood more helicopters were dispatched and additional relief supplies were ferried in via fixed wing aircraft. Traffic began to build and, unknown to everyone outside of WLO, it was being handled by only two operators. Rene and Mike worked around the clock,

sleeping fitfully at their operating positions, for two days straight. Shelia Ried, an operator, finally arrived and was able to take over some duties. In addition, members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary were dispatched to assist.

By now the message traffic had risen to the thousands and WLO was processing them all. Aircraft inbound and outbound, all had to have a radio watch or they could not fly. WLO performed this service. Rescue helicopters had to be directed to rooftops and information about survivors had to be relayed. Each message was vital and each was filled with stress for the operators. People were dependent on two faceless, unknown men at the other end of a radio circuit.

In addition to radios, WLO maintained an internet link via a fiber optic cable provided by the local telephone company. Since there had been no power to the area since the storm passed through, the telephone company fiber hut had been running on battery back up. When the batteries finally failed, their primary telephone system as well as their internet link, all went dead. This left them with only two old hard wired telephones that could be used for phone-patch services. While some limited cellular service was available, it was so overloaded that it was virtually worthless.

After a few days, a special aircraft communications relay platform was sent to New Orleans to assist. In principal, this should

have reduced traffic through WLO but in practice, it was soon apparent that Rene and Mike were more proficient operators and that their links were more reliable than the airborne one. Therefore, instead of reducing their message load, it was, at least for a time, increased. Fortunately additional land line communications were established and this reduced the load on WLO, the Coast Guard Command Centers and ATC Mobile.

For the first twelve days after Katrina passed through Mobile and New Orleans, WLO provided uninterrupted communications for the rescue and relief efforts. As the Coast Guard, FEMA and the National Guard were able to bring in their own communications systems, the role of WLO and their consequential traffic load decreased, until finally WLO was returned to a back up status.

In my view WLO, their operators and engineers are the unknown heroes who deserve recognition, not only because they saw a need and rose to the occasion, but because they once again showed the need for training, discipline and ingenuity in providing a vital communications link between several agencies that did not have an interoperable communications system. As a final note, I think it should be stated that after it was all over and life returned to normal, the Coast Guard recognized the contribution of WLO by presenting them with a service award and asked to be billed for their expenses during

the relief effort. I think it is also fair to comment that the Coasties had their act together through this whole affair. As all of us who have ever been to sea know, they went about the business of saving people without any regard to politics, jurisdiction or future recognition. They just got the job done and sorted out the details after it was over.

Herbert R. Perkins WA2IRV

WVOA MEMBER NEWS

TELEGRAPHERS REUNION JUNE 2 & 3, 2006

Join members of the MORSE TELEGRAPH CLUB for a reunion of telegraphers at the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village at Dearborn, Michigan on June 2 & 3, 2006. This event will be a celebration of telegraphy and an opportunity for both wire (land-line) and wireless telegraphers to gather for a special historical event.

The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village can only be described as national treasures. The Ford Museum has numerous world-renown exhibits covering subjects such as industry, home economics, agriculture, transportation, lighting, and communications. Telegraphers and radio operators will be most

interested in seeing the outstanding telegraph, telephone, and radio communications exhibits. Former railroaders will enjoy the exhibits of early rolling stock and steam locomotives.

The Greenfield Village contains numerous historic buildings, including Edison's Menlo Park Laboratory, an early roundhouse and turntable, an operating steam train, and early railroad depot. Here, one can tour the homes of famous early Americans, like Daniel Webster, visit an early power house, and a turn-of-the century machine shop! There is something here for the entire family!

The Morse Telegraph Club has prepared a fun and exciting agenda with plenty of opportunities for family time and socializing. Here is the agenda:

Friday, June 2:

- *Hospitality Room and Event Registration* at the Courtyard Marriott Hotel, 5200 Mercury Drive, Dearborn. We will have a working Morse telegraph office set up to permit communications with similarly equipped telegraph offices throughout the US and Canada. See real land-line telegraphy in use. Snacks and a Cash Bar are included.

Saturday, June 3:

- *Morse Demonstration at the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village.*

Members and guests may tour the museum at their leisure with special discount group rates arranged for the Morse Telegraph Club. See Edison's Menlo Park Laboratory, a completely restored round-house, ride an operating steam train, visit the homes of famous Americans!

- A banquet will be held at the Dearborn Inn, across the street from the Henry Ford Museum from 6 to 10-PM. This event includes meals, a guest speaker, and an invocation sent in American Morse in honor of the telegraph profession.

Please contact James Wades with questions.
Phone: 269-673-8805

E-Mail: wb8siw@charter.net

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.

WENDELL'S NEWS CORNER

From: Clay and Margaret Scott

To: [Wendell R Benson](mailto:Wendell.R.Benson@nyc.rr.com)

Sent: Wednesday, March 22, 2006 8:54 PM

Subject: Re: 14th Issue of VWOA Newsletter

Hi Wendell,

Your "Wendell's News Corner" in the 14th issue of the VWOA newsletter was very interesting. The account of your experience with WSL and WSF added a lot to your previous bio as given in the first issue of the VWOA newsletter. Yeah, back in the good ol days, I remember working WSF many times in my QTO and QTP NYC. WSL, though, was a wonderful station and I always felt close to home whenever I could hear WSL, or WCC, from anywhere in the world. For me, WCC and WSL were the king and queen stations of the east coast, though I really can't say which was the king.

Thinking back, now over a span of more than fifty years, I tend to forget a lot of detail about most of my early experiences but the general thoughts are nostalgic and pleasant. These little reminders that I read in the VWOA newsletter bring back recollections some of the good times that I had as radio officer with the merchant marine.

You and Francis are doing a fine job with the newsletter and I believe all the other guys enjoy and appreciate it as much I do. Thanks.
Clay Scott

Visit the Following URL for an interesting look into Early United States Radio History.

www.earlyradiohistory.us/index.html

Any VWOA Member, who wants to make a contact with those Members mentioned in any of the Newsletters, may contact VWOA and request that contact information. In the interest of protecting Identity Theft of VWOA records that are not part of the FCC published records we have established this logging procedure to allow further communications among the VWOA Members.

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.

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We would prefer to hear from you by Email at:

ftcassidy@optonline.net

Or

wenben@nyc.rr.com

but if you must, send mail to:

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