

VWOA NEWSLETTER

Email Issue #3

2005



Our 2nd Vice President and Web Master of the VWOA web site <http://www.vwoa.org> has recently updated the Web Site with a new category called "On-Line Publications." If you click on the link on the home page (clearly labeled) you go to a page that shows the covers of the last two electronic newsletters and the 2005 Yearbook. Click on any cover picture and a window opens (if you have Acrobat Reader, of course) with the appropriate document in full, wonderful, vibrant color. Of course, folks can also right click on the image and save it to disk. It works really well and has so very, very much potential for the VWOA going forward. Clearly the potential for a true on-line library of historical documents, old yearbooks, and who know's what is intriguing as we define the VWOA vision of the future.

Here's the URL which takes you directly to the "On-Line Publications." page, if you don't want to navigate through our site:

<http://www.vwoa.org/OnlinePubs.htm>

If you haven't investigated the VWOA Web Site before take a look at VWOA history; Past and Present. It is your Life and Heritage!

We have a new Snail Mail Address for those items you don't want to send by Email:

Mail all correspondence to:
Veteran Wireless Operators Association
PO Box 1003
Peck Slip
New York, NY 10272-1003

The following letter was addressed to Edwin F. Pleuler W2EIQ, VWOA Secretary in 1997 in response to a series of questions asked by Edwin of many of the membership and to VWOA Member Earl W. Korf, a SK on 11/23/03, in particular. I found it delightful reading and wanted to pass it on to our existing membership to add to their Wireless tales down Memory Lane. His letter is about 7 pages long and I will continue it in the next Issue of the Email VWOA Newsletter if you are still interested.



EARL W. KORF

Dear ED:
Finally getting around to writing up my Life's History. Much of it is in the articles from OOTC, which you belong to and one from the Old China Hands which is a reprint from the Spark Gap Times. Will try and fill in these articles with a not too lengthy story.

You ask: How and when did you get your start into Wireless Communications?

I might say I inherited some of it from my Father who was a railroad morse telegrapher. Dad worked many railroad stations throughout Kansas, Okla, Missouri and Texas. I was born in Oklahoma on July 27, 1904 but moved to south Texas at age 2. My very first memory I can recall was seeing Halley's Comet with its long tail which covered almost half of the sky. This was in 1910. I was later to see it again in 1986.

My Dad taught the morse code to all of his two sons and two daughters at age of about 8.

In 1912 when the Titanic sank, I first learned something about wireless. I can vividly remember that night. There was terrific excitement that day before the disaster. Every one was talking about the Titanic breaking the record. Dad was the only source of information to the small town I lived in. Every one crowded around Dad with his morse line clicking away news on this historic voyage.

We lived a mile from the depot. Dad came home for supper then put us kids to bed and returned to the station to catch the latest news on the Titanic. As he received the news on the ship sinking, he ran all the

way home to tell us all about it, waking us kids up. He was so excited but don't think us kids were all excited as I was only 8. Anyway when he told us, he went back and spent the rest of the night at the railroad station. So at age 8 I first heard about wireless.

In 1916 we spent a vacation in San Diego and liked it so well, we went back to Texas and planned on moving to California. In 1917 when the WW 1 broke out, my older brother Roy joined the Navy and was in training at Goat Island near SF when he got sick and spent almost all of one year in the Mare Island Navy hospital. That's when we moved to Napa to be near Roy.

In 1919 in the Fall, the amateurs were again licensed and allowed to get on the air after being grounded during the war. My brother had enlisted as an electrician mate striking for wireless or something like that. My small knowledge of the American morse and strong desire to learn about wireless, prompted me to join the Napa Amateur Radio Club. So before 1919 ended, I had my first license, 6WX and on the air with a Ford Spark coil, Leyden Jar condenser and galena crystal receiver. My first experience with wireless in late 1919.

After a year of various jobs with the shirt factory, the glove factory and Mare Island Navy Yard, I decided on learning a trade.

Starting with Western Union as a messenger and apprentice telegrapher. For almost a year, I was telegraphing day and night. Day time at WU Office working hard on my morse and evenings and late some nights working my ham radio, using continental code.

In mean time, brother Roy was out of the Navy and sailing the seven seas as a wireless operator. I thought I would like to follow him but for the present I wanted to finish my WU training.

Think my first big thrill in wireless came in thusly: Roy was sailing coast-wise on a tanker, Bohemian Club and told me on phone he would be passing abeam of SF and he would send in his TR at noon to KPH. Would send it in slow speed so I could pick it up. Imagine my excitement when at that prescribed time I heard my brother send his msg to KPH and I copied solid. Of course the distance was only about 70 miles, but I had to notify my Mothers and Sisters and the whole neighborhood at my great accomplishment. Later when I was a sea going wireless operator working for the well known Dick Johnston of RCA, I happened to mention this to RJ. He said he was the KPH opr that day was wondering who that lid was, sending so slow speed and saying (Hello to Earl) and they had no Earls at KPH. So the

mystery of the Lid opr on the tanker was cleared up.

By 1922 I had graduated from WU and doing relief operating around the SF and northern California offices and had become quite proficient as an operator. Dad had quit the railroad and was working at Mare Island and when I was doing relief work in Napa. He was so happy when I invited him into the office and letting him work the morse wire.

In the Spring of 1923, I took a permanent job as manager of the WU office in Ukiah, but tired a bit of the same station but did enjoy the relief work. Altho I was getting a pretty good salary of \$100 per month, when my brother would write and tell some exciting and thrilling stories of world wide travels etc; I got the itch to go to sea and find out for myself what sea life was all about.

My opportunity arrived in August 1923 when a Captain Jack Harris and his friend and shipmate, my brother bought an old sailing ship and planned a trip to the south seas. The ship was outfitting or loading in San Francisco and they needed a cabin boy, deck boy. Roy thought of me and broached the subject and I jumped at the chance. I could not turn it down, but on the other hand did not like to quit WU as they had been good to me and I had a

good future with them. I was, at 18 the youngest manager in all of northern California.

Thought it over for few days and finally decided to quit WU and go for it. As I had to be in SF the next day, had to get the midnite train out of Ukiah and I still had not notified my boss in SFO. When I sent in my wire of resignation giving them only 6 hours of notice, I did a terrible thing. The big boss in SF, Mr. A. H. May talked to me on his private morse line trying to talk me out of it. When he was convinced my mind was made up he said well, Earl you are crazy and this means you are black-balled from Western Union for life. At that crazy age, that didn't bother me. Incidentally, I never have regretted that decision, as at this time teletype was starting to replace the morse operators and my job would have been eliminated a few years later anyway.

So I made the trip on the barkentine Mary Winkelman which is a story in itself, but I worked hard as deck boy, mess boy and cabin boy. But at night my brother taught me much of what I would need for a telegraph ticket and I got a lot of code practice every night, copying press, etc. We did have wireless gear on board, but on way south, did not use the P 8 transmitter for fear of explosion as wasn't sure of

grounding efficiency and the cargo of gasoline in tins.

We were shipwrecked shortly after departing Pago Pago, returning to SF on the SS Sonoma. No loss of life altho we almost lost the Captains wife.

Received my first commercial license in March 1924. One week on the beach and Dick Johnstone of RCA gave me my first sea going wireless operators job. Was a weeks voyage from SF to San Pedro and return on the Red Stack tug boat, Sea Ranger. On the 40 hour trip south, my receiver kept getting weaker and weaker. Could only hear ships within sight of us. Discovered the A battery was hooked up backwards. Last trip ships generator was changed and no one thought of checking the polarity. Had no other receiver. This was a honey comb set with one tube. After I changed the polarity of the charging leads, all was OK.

(to be continued)

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.