

# VWOA NEWSLETTER

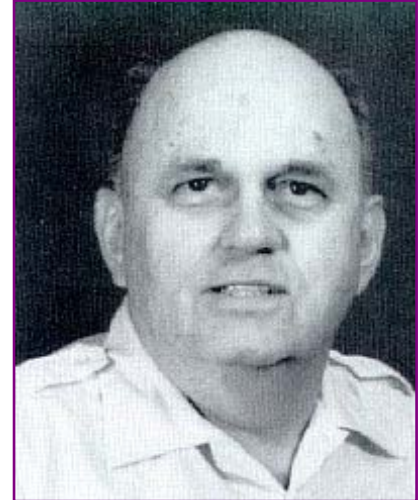
Email Issue #36

Francis T. Cassidy Editor

2008



In 1996 Walter H. Prang received the VWOA *Marconi Memorial Gold Medal of Achievement*, to "honor a U.S. Merchant Marine Radio Officer and his technical operations ashore..." Mr. Prang began his seagoing career in the engine room, before becoming a Radio Officer. After serving at sea as a Radio Officer, he came ashore to spend the rest of his career training countless Radio and Electronics Officers in the increasingly complex world of communications and navigation equipment. Along with fellow VWOA member Paul Anselmo, he helped establish and expand the training operations of the American Radio Association.



*Walter Prang* KZ5WP

Walter in this issue of the VWOA Newsletter as our featured Author will bring back Memories to All about his; **SERVICE ON THE SS AMERICAN VICTORY**

SS AMERICAN VICTORY/KKUI US Navigation Company New York

Date joined: July 17, 1951 at Earle Naval ammo pier, Leonardo, New Jersey.

Date departed: Feb. 12, 1952 Laid up at Mobile, Alabama.

Captain Gunderman, Chief Mate Tom Case, 2nd Mate Watson, 3rd Mate Nick Kanjar, Radio Officer Jerome W. Belford, Chief Engineer Joe Castiglione, Chief Electrician Walter Prang.

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The orders read:

Chief Electrician dispatched to vessel from New York, destination Holland and Belgium, 60 days. Replacements must sign on at Shipping Commissioner in New York before boarding vessel.

When aboard you discover the ship is bound for Japan and Korea.

Some accounts follow from crew members of a previous voyage of American Victory in spring of 1951 to Scotland with ammo.

Port of Cairnryan and Stranraer. Fire in Number One hold. CH Mate in lower hold with fire hose discovers labeling of cargo, "Keep away from water"!

Some crew running ashore. Ships cook standing on dock next to ship. When asked what he was doing, he replied I'm not staying on that ship if it is going to blow up. Obviously it didn't.

#### PAMAMA CANAL TRANSIT

Arrived Cristobal afternoon and passed thru Gatun Locks to Gatun Lake.

Since we were clear of the cut transit, (in those days), we anchored in Gatun Lake with 8000 tons of ammo!

Anyway in the 101 transits I have made it is the only one where we swam off the side of the ship in Gatun Lake!

Our first port was KURE Japan where we anchored and unloaded ammo. It is close to HIROSHIMA, but we didn't go sightseeing. Of interest was a large Japanese battleship of World War 2, which the Japanese told us was falsely claimed by the U.S. as having been sunk.

I went ashore with "Sparks", Jerry Belford. He was an avid photographer, and from the launch we were on he took a good picture of the American Victory. It was published by others on a magazine cover.

The Military Police there were Australian. They patrolled the bars to keep seamen out. They just returned every half hour and hollered get out! But they never enforced it!

From KURE we went to PUSON, Masan, and Suyung Man. We had to go back to Masan because they had neglected to discharge the fuses for the ammo we had unloaded there. They were in #4 tween deck, forward end under the house. Wooden sheathing had concealed it and it appeared that the hatch was empty.

As usual Sparks and I went ashore and got a lift in a jeep with a Korean driver. Every checkpoint we were saluted by the MP's---

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driver explained that this was a Colonel's jeep! The troops in that area were the 1st Marines.

After the ammo was discharged in Suyung we loaded empty artillery shells. A whole shipload for return to U.S. This was well and good, but the shells were loaded with live rats! So the rest of the trip you could encounter a rat sneaking into the officers or crew pantry at night. As hot as it was I didn't have my door on the hook!

We proceeded back to the U.S. via Panama etc. to Braithwaite, Louisiana just south of New Orleans to discharge the rats and shells for scrap. It was a nice break going to New Orleans.

Sparks had a relative, Shecky Green who performed in a nite club, so we were ok.

I went to the FCC there and passed the test for a ham license. Thanks to coaching by Sparks, Jerome W. Belford.

NEXT TRIP SAIGON MANILA KOREA for the NEW YEAR.

For the next voyage we departed NEW ORLEANS for the Ammo Depot at Theodore, Alabama, where we took a complete load of ammo. There was a bomb scare when a women called up and said we were going to blow up. It was kept quiet and I noticed the Chief Mate and the Bosun were searching the ship. I followed and on top of the house at

the stern steering station one of the metal balls on the side of the magnetic compass had fallen off. It was lying on the deck in a corner, and gave them a scare. Anyway it was a hoax.

We transited the Panama Canal and then proceeded to San Francisco to load landing craft on top of steel plates laid on top of the hatches. The landing craft were altered with a steel housing and armor. The French would use them to patrol up the interior waterways.

We were anchored near Suisun Bay, California loading them from barges.

Most of the crew was ashore. We got word to move the ship or we would be sitting on the bottom! I helped the Chief Mate who was on the wing of the bridge. I took care of the telegraph and bell book. We anchored okay.

After a long sea passage we arrived at Cape St Jaques pilot station at the mouth of the Saigon River. This was later renamed Vungtau and was the beach resort for GI's on rest and recreation.

At this point the French Army boarded and set up machine guns on the bow and stern as well as on the bridge. We anchored at a small village called NHA BE. Transportation to Saigon was by French Army trucks with canvas covers speeding from one gun tower to the

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next. There was a small fort there, and we noticed cars, trucks and oxcarts rushing inside. Obviously there was some imminent danger so we went to the gate, but they would not open it. We could hear bugles in the distance so we were lucky to find the launch still there to get back to the ship!

We were there about 10 days unloading the landing craft and some ammo. We had shore leave in Saigon but it was dangerous. Seven Legionnaires were killed in the bar of the Majestic Hotel. A grenade was thrown in by a terrorist riding a cyclo, a motorized bike. I noticed sheets of chicken wire spread out in front of bars and restaurants. The French Foreign Legion there were German ex POW"s. They had no homes to go back to.

We had winch trouble. The starboard winch at #5 hatch had to be dismantled. A 500 pound armature lifted out to replace a burned out field coil. Number 4 hatch winches were all busy so we could not rig anything from there.

The American military, there to supervise the operation, was one colonel and two sergeants. (Some escalation later!)

As soon as all the French cargo was discharged they removed their troops and left. They insisted that we leave at night! Our Captain did not like the idea of sailing down river in the dark with no protection! It seems we did not sail that night

as the Radio Officer was ashore. He showed up next morning staggering and carrying bottles of wine and long French breads. Once aboard he just straightened up and went to work! We then sailed in daylight! He and the Captain had sailed together on another ship!

We were bound for Manila but ran into a bad typhoon. I understand it was about a three day run but we ran into two bad typhoons and it took 9 days. The ship took a beating. The portside after lifeboat was torn off and went overboard. The davit was twisted like a pretzel. The cargo in half empty holds had bombs flying back and forth.

We arrived in Manila and had repairs made and a replacement lifeboat. We loaded hemp for Korea! Dangerous when getting the portable cargo lamps into the hatches, could start a fire!

We proceeded to Pusan and Su Yung Man to discharge remainder of ammo. So we passed New Year, Jan. 1, 1952 in Korea!

We departed and sailed east, thru Panama of course. We arrived at Mobile, Alabama where an inventory was taken. We were paid off, and several of us took the railroad to New York!

**THE END**

**Walter Prang KZ5WP**



## WENDELL'S NEWS CORNER



New VWOA Member Stig-Olof Jokinen

A picture of him from the Finland vessel m/s Andersoe/oiii, called hundred eleven by the operators at helsinkiradio, due to the c/s.

----- Original Message -----

From: "stig-olof jokinen" <

To: "Wendell R Benson" <

Sent: Friday, March 28, 2008 2:48 PM

Subject: rq

Hi agn Wendell,

Please let me know if I'm starting to be a pain in Your a\*\*, I know You are a busy man. Just wanted to give a comment to the article abt the canadian YL Olive Carroll and how she

described her occupation onboard the norwegian mv Siranger.

I know that R/O's duties on board scandinavian vessels were the same as O.C. had to experience. Besides the main occupation, being a radio security officer

You also had the job as the ships purser and Captains secretary, although paper-work during the radio watches at sea was prohibited. It was done as overtime at sea or during ordinary working time (8hrs/day) while the stay in ports.

(In the 60s' and 70s') I Remember that I heard about R/O:s in US and some other nations ships being only responsible for the radio job, and I envied them. Lazy person as I am.

Much later I realized that having these other duties, gave me some advantage searching for land based vacancies.

As a R/O in finnish ships I calculated the crews salaries, monitored what each crew-member could access from his earnings in visited ports, printed crew lists, custom-declarations and other official documents on arrival. On occasion I even wrote ships damage reports.

Like to hear Your comments on this.

73 Stig-Olof+

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----- Original Message -----

From: stig-olof jokinen

To: [Wendell R Benson](#)

Sent: Monday, March 31, 2008 8:48 AM

Subject: Re: Emailing: - cw keying

Hi Wendell!

Abt keying. I was depended on hearing the sound of my own signals otherwise I cud not be sure of the quality. Therefore the danish Telematic was just a fine purchase. It had a built in soundgenerator.

Some coastal radio operators, specially in very busy stations, cud be quite sensitive if they thought that ones handstyle did not please them.

Don't know if You are familliar with the Q-code QLF? = Are You transmitting with Your left foot?

I do not remember having any tfc over WSF even if the c/s sounds familliar.

I had tfc via WCC, Tamparadio and some stations in VA, Louisiana and Texas (forgot their c/s).

I worked a lot with USCG-stations because of the participation in the AMVER-system. Then during our voyages to Great Lakes and Canadian ports along the St Lawrence seaway I worked Halifax and a lot of smaller stns along the road.

73

Stig-Olof+

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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:

[ftcassidy@optonline.net](mailto:ftcassidy@optonline.net)

or

[wenben@nyc.rr.com](mailto:wenben@nyc.rr.com)

but if you must, send mail to:

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