

# VWOA NEWSLETTER

Email Issue #4

2005



The VWOA Election Ballot was sent out to our Membership with only minor obstacles, which were overcome. Those members for whom we have no Email Address received the Ballot via Snail Mail. Remember to follow the instructions and return by October 15, 2005

Our Director Bernard Flatow reported to the Board of Directors his recent speaking engagements at many military and maritime venues, presenting an overview of the Merchant Marine and Wireless Communications. At the end of his Committee Report, an invitation was extended by the Board, for Bernie to be the Keynote Speaker at the VWOA Fall Luncheon. The 80<sup>th</sup> Annual Business Luncheon will take place on Saturday, November 19, 2005 at the Top Deck of the Seamen's Church Institute, 241 Water Street, New York City.

We would like you to remember that the object and general purpose of the Veteran Wireless Operators Association, founded in 1925, is to foster and extend an esprit de corps among wireless operators and acquaint the general public with the work, traditions, ideals, equipment and meritorious service of wireless operators and others engaged in the art of radio communications.

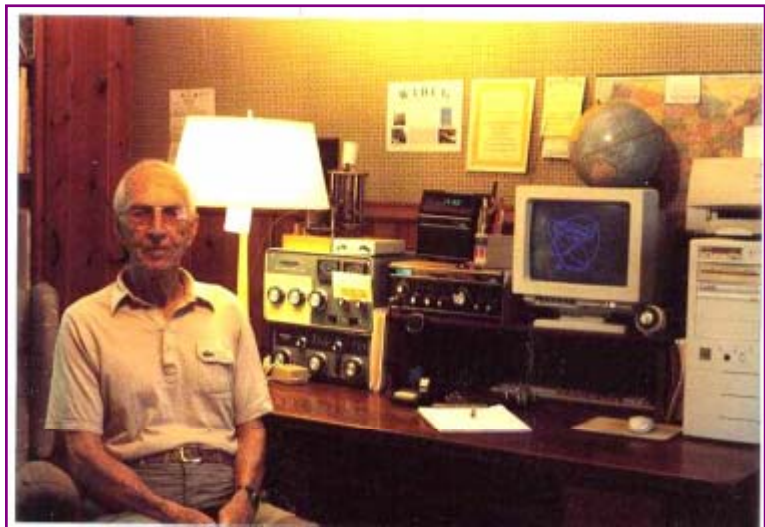
As the years pass by, the vintage communications equipment that is such a vital part of our heritage is beginning to disappear. So-called "clutter" from basements and attics is being thrown in the trash without a second

thought. Much of this equipment may represent museum pieces, or a one-of-a-kind model representing a particular make or type of equipment, or an actual working instrument that could be used to demonstrate the capabilities or operation of certain radio sets or technology.

VWOA Director Rick Kenney and Treasurer Mike Shaw bring this to your attention in a VWOA Web Site Page called Preserve Our History.

Visit the VWOA site at <http://www.vwoa.org/> review the document behind "Preserve Our History" and see if it applies to YOU.

We usually end our Newsletter asking you to respond. David J. Bechtold W3DB did and brought to our attention an article he wrote for the US Army Corps of Engineers Philadelphia District;



*David J. Bechtold W3DB*

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## The saga of the Philadelphia District hopper dredge *William L. Marshall* in World War II

The following narrative comes from the World War II memoirs of David J. Bechtold then of Johnstown, PA, who thought the story would be of interest to our VWOA Members. It relates largely to the activities of the Philadelphia District's seagoing hopper dredge William L. Marshall in 1944 and 1945, when Bechtold (an Army warrant officer with a bachelor's in electrical engineering) served aboard the vessel.

To read his narrative, visit the following URL.  
<http://www.nap.usace.army.mil/cenap-pa/w0102/marshall.htm>

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The following is a continuing part of the letter that 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.



**EARL W. KORF**

## Continuing the final part of the letter:

Made 2 trips coast-wise on the old Rose City WWR as 2<sup>nd</sup> operator. Big rotary spark. Then went to Alaska, Bristol Bay with the salmon fleet. North on the full rigged windjammer, Star of Italy and returned in the Fall on the large 4 masted barque Star of Lapland. Honey comb coil receivers and quarter KW submarine transmitters.

Next 4 years sailing the Pacific on oil tankers such as the China Arrow, etc. On of my most interesting and enjoyable trips was a special assignment to Australia on a British tanker, the Pulpit Point GMPK in 1925.

Spent six months on the City of San Francisco. RXY, sailing for the Panama Mail SS Co, SF, LA down west coast of Mexico, Central America then thru the Canal and return. Passenger ship with American Captain and Deck Officers and Swedish Engineers. Had new RCA Tube Transmitter, etc. and opr and myself had ham radio licenses and was able to use them as ship was not registered in USA. We had a nightly sked with 2UO (W2UO) the New York Times on 40 meters and relayed position reports from many ships. Position (TR) reports would be printed in the Times the next morning. Also did some press stories for the paper.

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Spent 8 months on the tanker Larry Doheney WOBE on California, New York run then in Spring of 1928, decided on another summer in Bristol Bay Alaska. Intended to be home by Fall but accepted a Winter job at Naknek (KHT) and did not return to the states until Fall of 1930. This 2 1/2 year assignment, running the Cannery Station was exciting and had many interesting jobs. One of my fond memorable periods in my career. Had a ham station there, (K7ANS) and worked Admiral Bird's Antarctica expedition at the base near the South Pole. Distance 9000 statute miles which I believe was a record at the time. Chats when Bird flew over the Pole. At this time, 1929, Bob Gleason also was in the North, frozen in Northeast Siberia.

Then in Aug 1930, I returned to San Francisco on the steamer Behring, which concluded my sea going days.

In the Fall of 1930, I joined the Airlines (TWA) and spent the next 12 years in the communications dept of TWA as radio operator. Worked as relief operator all stations coast to coast.

I was the radio operator on duty in Burbank in Feb 1942 when movie star, Carole Lombard was killed in accident out of Las Vegas. I was the last one to speak to the pilot, shortly after takeoff for Burbank. He called me right after takeoff, giving me time

out and ETA Burbank. I acknowledged and gave him his airway clearance. Few minutes later the plane hit a mountain, killing all.

Forgot to mention that my first telegraph license was signed by Herbert Hoover, Secretary of Commerce. And Herb Hoover, Jr. TWA radio engineer was the one who hired me, in TWA in 1930.

On Dec 7, 1941, I was permanently stationed in Burbank as senior ground radio operator. Was a hectic time in that area near LA for the next 2 weeks or so.

When TWA received an Army contract to fly ATC for the Army Air Corps, I joined as flight radio instructor. We were based in Washington. From 42 to 44 I flew steadily as FRO. Had many memorable flights. First flight was last of March when we picked up Jimmy Doolittle in India and flew him back to Washington, shortly after his rescue from the Tokyo raid. Next flight in June 1942 when we flew Eisenhower and Mark Clark to London. Also was in the Casa Blanca conference with Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin. We flew the back up plane for FDR, carrying the press and the Presidents bags. Another memorable flight was when we went to China and brought to America, Madame Chang Kai Shek. In Spring of 43, we took her back to China, getting lost over the hump and almost ending up in

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Japanese hands. Made safe landing in China after a night of storms, losing our way. We were decorated with the Chinese Cloud and Banner award, China's second highest award.

In 1944, I checked out as a Navigator and flew my last flight as radio operator. This ended my illustrious wireless, radio career of 20 years including 300 ocean crossings as flight radio operator. I was flying transport planes for the Army the remaining 2 years of the war. I flew into and out of the war zones in Europe, Africa, Middle and Far East, India and China. I found the navigation was more challenging and I might say, easier than radio operating. Sitting and listening for 3 to 12 hours with cans on head, thru all the static, enemy jamming, etc., I missed, but on the other hand, the Navigator, after getting his 3 star fix, working out position etc. could sit back and relax for 40 mins or so. I was in communications so long and had a deep respect for the boys I now was working with and never figured the Navigator was any more important than the radio boys. They pulled me out of more than on jam. Always cherish these 20 years pounding brass.

I missed D Day in 44 as I was flying to Casa Blanca.

When the war was declared over in Europe, I was in Prestwick, Scotland, the big Air

Force base in Scotland. What a wild night! No one got any sleep.

Now that the war was over and our Army contract was completed, I thought I would go back on TWA as radio operator (ground stn opr). TWA almost immediately started their commercial overseas flying and I stayed on as a Navigator, until 1964 when Navigators were removed from TWA, when Doppler and Inertial Navigation took over our jobs.

I spent 10 years based in Cairo, Egypt from 46 to 56. Those were some of the happiest years of my career. I was the Chief Navigator. Also bought a war surplus J3C Piper Cub. After 5 years of use, I sold it to a pilot for Ethiopian Airlines in Addis Ababa and decided to deliver it myself. That was a thrill of a life time for me. Many said it couldn't be done. I installed an auxiliary tank in the space where I removed the front seat. I flew over deserts and mountains, taking 6 days. Two of the legs were over 9 hours, non-stop. Many more exciting things in Cairo including near miss of being shot down by an Egyptian Mig. Witnessing the burning of the Shephards Hotel during King Farouk's ousting etc. In 1956, the canal was seized by General Nassar, we had to be evacuated by Navy ship.

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Then back to New York where I continued flying as Check Navigator, until we were furloughed in 1964. I was 60 and eligible for pension and instead of accepting a ground job at JFK, decided to take the pension along with a good severance pay. But at this stage I was not thru flying as many non-scheduled airlines were using Navigators, over the age of 60.

I flew with several other airlines including an 18 month assignment with the CIA. Wish I could tell you what crazy and dangerous experiences I had with them. Many trips to Vietnam and other parts of the world.

Then in 1970, after 2 years with Seaboard World Airlines, the inertial navigator replaced us Navigators and I was on the beach again. In 1972 took a new Boeing 320 from Seattle to Rome and Saudi Arabia, which was my very last paying trip in the air. I was now 68 now and had acquired quite a record, by accumulating 830 ocean crossings, 16,000 hours and 4,475,000 miles in the air.

After finally retiring I adjusted to other things besides flying. Was active in the Little League, Church and running. Also climbed mountains. With my Son, have

climbed 38 of the highest points in the USA. Did two, half marathons, but no complete marathons. Heart trouble interrupted.

Ed, sorry this had to be so long, so do your best to digest it down to a reasonable size.

Good luck 73

Earl W. Korf  
VWOA Life Member

In the next newsletter we will hear from VWOA Member William B. Devoe AA3YR about his World War II Voyages on Liberty Ships as told to his Grand Children. This particular one is listed as Voyage #3 10/9/43 - 2/16/44

Baltimore to Khorramshahr to New York.

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.