

VWOA NEWSLETTER

Email Issue #6

2005



This will be the last Email Newsletter before the October 15 deadline for receiving VWOA Ballots for electing Officers and Directors for the 2006/2007 terms. So make sure YOU have made a choice in selecting those you want to serve as your Representatives in the VWOA. Send in your ballot.

Director Bernie Flatow announces a Celebration Program for Merchant Marine Veterans at Kingsboro Community College in Brooklyn, New York on November 9, 2005.

This location is the site of the US Maritime Service Training Station of Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, NY. A location that many of our VWOA Radio Officers, graduates of the Gallups and Hoffman Island Schools took their Maritime Basic Training.

Assembly of attendees will take place in the cafeteria. Lunch will be served at 12 Noon
The Memorial Program will take place in the auditorium at 1 PM

A wreath will be placed in the water from a boat at about 1:30 PM

A Special visit to the Flag Pole, cannon and brass plaque memorials will be made at 2:30 PM

The Memorial Ceremony will adjourn at 3 PM.

If you have an interest in attending send an Email to 71147.1437@att.net and I will provide Bernie Flatows telephone number for further coordination details.

Bernard Flatow to be the Keynote Speaker at the VWOA Fall Luncheon. The 80th 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. Notices with Reservation Forms will go out to VWOA Members in October.

Walter Kane WB1FYS found the previous published Email Newsletter Member stories interesting and submitted his own story "The Assignment" which he maintains: The story is true. The details and events are factual and accurate.

His background is described in detail in his CallSign listing at www.QRZ.com and career details and adventures are described at his website www.wjkane.com

Briefly, Walter Kane WB1FYS was introduced to wireless communications in 1973 while attending Radioman School at USCG Training Center, Petaluma, California. After graduation, he joined the crew of Cutter Ingham (NRDL) for a 15-month tour of duty. He subsequently served two years at USCG Communications Station Boston (NMF).

Walter is currently Director, Product Management, for Globe Wireless. He lives and works in Palm Bay, FL.



Walter Kane WB1FYS

The Assignment

On final approach to Portland, Oregon's airport, I was able to view the Columbia River through the aircraft's passenger window. My interest was more than casual. I was enroute to a vessel, which would eventually transit that river on her way to the Pacific Ocean; bound for a transoceanic voyage.

SS Ocean Wizard was berthed at Cascade General Shipyard. As I crossed the gangway and boarded her, I sensed urgency. Workers appeared to be everywhere, above and below decks. They were inside the cargo tanks and engine room spaces. They were cutting, grinding and welding. Despite the appearance of chaotic frenzy, it was actually a well-orchestrated event. These craftsmen were tasked with restoring the vessel's cargo

handling capability; and, her seaworthiness. Their mission was to prepare the vessel for her forthcoming sea trials, inspections and voyage.

Ocean Wizard was a very large crude carrier (VLCC). She had been retired by the United States Maritime Administration several years earlier. She'd been resting easy alongside the pier where the only activity was the slow, persistent accumulation of rust. Despite her age and diminished condition, she had potential. She also had capacity – lots of it. Her cargo tanks could hold more than 2 million barrels of crude oil. Her new owners were anxious to complete the mandatory repair, inspection and certification activities. They couldn't rest easy until Ocean Wizard was underway, headed for the Persian Gulf. The government of Kuwait had promised a full cargo. They were waiting for the vessel's arrival at Sea Island, an offshore facility five miles from Kuwait City's coastline. Sea Island's only purpose was the loading of supertankers.

I introduced myself to the Captain and informed him that I was his Radio Officer. We quickly completed the formalities and he handed me keys for my stateroom and the radio room. I found the radio station in good condition. Local radio technicians had been contracted to test all equipment and correct any defects. The FCC inspector had recently completed his radio station inspection

survey. He signed off on all relevant compliance documents. Nevertheless, I personally inspected all external antennae, energized and tested the radio receivers, transmitters, and automatic alarm devices. I verified that all documents, publications and relevant clerical items were in stock. The vessel's radio station was squared away.

Several weeks later, the Ocean Wizard was declared seaworthy. Her Officers and Crew were busy with preparations for departure. The Captain had reviewed and approved the Navigation Officer's charts and sailing plan. The intention was to proceed directly to Singapore for bunkers (fuel) and fresh food supplies. We would then resume the passage to Sea Island.

After two days at sea, I was settling into my routine. I was on duty during the hours of 0800-1100, 1300-1600 and 1800-2000. During the radio watch, I monitored distress frequencies 500Khz and 2182Khz. I also maintained the radio log. I was also kept very busy with an extraordinary amount of message traffic, which was transmitted via Inmarsat satellite telex. I also exercised the short-wave radio systems, transmitting AMVER and weather observations to coastal radio stations via Morse code.

I was on duty, maintaining a radio watch when, suddenly, the lights went out. In fact,

we lost all electrical power. I found myself sitting in the dark.

The vibrations, which are typical on any ship, slowly dissipated. When the vessel's emergency lighting system did not activate, I knew we were experiencing a major catastrophe. Ocean Wizard was dead in the water. We were drifting, out of control, more than 800 miles from civilization.

As you might imagine, there was immediate and frantic activity by the Engineers. The vessel's large steam engine had shut down. Indeed, without electrical power, all shipboard systems stopped working. The vessel's emergency generator was designed to start automatically in the event of a primary power failure. The large, diesel engine could supply power to designated circuits, providing lighting and voltage to critical systems throughout the vessel. It would later be determined that the emergency generator had been inadvertently set for manual starting instead of automatic operation.

In any event, several engineers raced to the emergency generator room to manually start the generator. They got the diesel engine started. But, almost immediately thereafter, the engine's turbocharger failed in a rather spectacular fashion. I was told it literally exploded, separating completely from the engine. The emergency generator was severally damaged. This was a significant

challenge for the engineers who were desperate to restore power to the vessel. Without emergency power to energize certain engine room circuits and systems, they would not be able to get the large steam engine started.

Meanwhile, on the bridge, the Captain and navigation Officers were experiencing their own anxiety. They could only stand by helplessly and wait for reports from the Chief Engineer. The vessel was no longer under command. The only working devices in their possession were flashlights and hand held, battery powered, VHF radio transceivers. They made repeated calls on VHF channels 16 and 13, trying to contact any ship that might be in range. Unfortunately, prior to the power failure, RADAR had not detected any ships within range of Ocean Wizard.

We were all alone on the high seas. And, we were in distress . . .

As you might expect, the Captain and Chief Engineer consulted with each other many times during that fateful day. Despite heroic efforts, the Engineers were not able to repair the emergency generator. Eventually, the consensus was unanimous – we needed to make the call for assistance.

The Captain came to the radio room to determine what signaling capability, if any, I was able to exploit. I had two radio systems

available to me; the battery powered reserve receiver and transmitter, and the lifeboat radio transceiver. The Captain handed me our latitude and longitude and a telephone number for the vessel's owners. He instructed me to contact "somebody" and get a message forwarded to the owners. I was to inform them of our tragic situation and request immediate assistance.

For the moment, it appeared that the fate of Ocean Wizard and her crew were in my hands. If I could not establish communications with another radio station to arrange assistance; and, the Engineers couldn't restore power, it was conceivable that we could drift aimlessly across the Pacific Ocean for a long time . . .

Of course, I was confident in my ability to communicate. New batteries for the radio room emergency equipment had been installed during the shipyard period. They were in excellent condition and fully charged. I had tested and insured that the reserve equipment functioned properly prior to our departure. It was the first time in my career that I actually had to rely on this reserve equipment to communicate. However, it was designed to be of service under these very conditions.

I energized the battery powered radio receiver and reserve transmitter, tuning them

to the international distress frequency of 500 Khz. Using the hand key, I commenced broadcasting an urgent message in Morse code:

“XXX XXX XXX CQ DE WMBZ WMBZ BT NEED ASSISTANCE AR K”

Moments later, the ARCO Fairbanks, a product tanker traveling between Valdez, Alaska and Long Beach, California, responded to my transmission. In an exchange of Morse code signals, the Fairbanks’ Radio Officer acknowledged our message and relayed it via Inmarsat satellite telephone to our owners. He would subsequently act as a relay station, allowing us to exchange information.

We were informed that an ocean going tug boat would be dispatched from Seattle to find us. It was their stated intention to rig a towline and tow us back to the shipyard for repairs. The tugs speed was 8 knots. We calculated that it would be several days before the tug could travel more than 800 miles and then locate us...

I went on to broadcast an urgent notice to mariners on 500 Khz, informing all ships in the area that Ocean Wizard was not under command. We had no ability to navigate. We certainly could not comply with the maritime “rules of the road”.

The radio operators at U.S. Coast Guard communication station San Francisco (radio callsign NMC) had intercepted my signals. Our message was forwarded to the Coast Guard rescue coordination center at Alameda, California.

The drama was unfolding and becoming quite public. The Coast Guard wanted to know if we intended to declare a distress situation. Ocean Wizard’s Captain understood maritime law. If we declared distress, any salvage tug that raced to our assistance and got a line attached could make certain, lucrative claims against the vessel’s owner...

Since we were not in immediate danger of sinking or abandoning ship, we “calmly” informed the Coast Guard that we were not in distress and that a tow had been requested and arranged. We would simply wait until the tugboat arrived on scene. Of course, this would mean several more days without lights, running water, cooked food, or properly functioning toilet facilities. We had no options.

Fortunately, two days later, while we were waiting for the tug’s arrival, the Ocean Wizard Engineers’ continuing quest to restore power was rewarded. Through sheer determination and exhaustive effort, they eventually achieved success. They restored electrical power and brought the steam engine back on line, in a somewhat limited condition. They

could only deliver 3 knots of propulsion. But, it was enough. We were underway again!

Many days later we arrived back in Portland. The Ocean Wizard would undergo another series of repairs necessary to prepare her for the voyage to Kuwait. I remained onboard during the shipyard period and we eventually got underway again. The vessel made it safely to Singapore and then Kuwait.

We loaded our cargo of crude oil and departed on a voyage to discharge port Come-By-Chance, Newfoundland. The passage would take us south across the Indian Ocean, around South Africa and across the South and North Atlantic oceans. Of course, that's another story ...

Walter Kane
Ends//

VWOA MEMBER NEWS

VWOA Life Member Ray Mullin writes:

I have been in past contact with the folks at WA2XMN and the people in Alpine. It has been very memorable and enjoyable during the summer to share their wideband FM commemorative Armstrong broadcasts on their special event station and exchange reports with them.

I thought that I might share this information with you, and should you send them a QSL report, they will respond. You do not need to be a licensed radio amateur or own a commercial receiver or amateur receiver to pick up their signal, since they will be on wideband FM operating on 42.8 MHz.

From: Al Klase

To: undisclosed-recipients:

Sent: Saturday, October 01, 2005 12:52 AM

Subject: WA2XMN FM 42.8 MC - OTA 9 October

Armstrong Fans;

*WA2XMN will be on the air from the Armstrong

Tower on Sunday, 9 October

from 5:30 to 7:30 PM.*

This broadcast will originate at the Audio Engineering Society Convention at the Jacob Javits Center in New York City with an STL to the transmitter site in Alpine, NJ. The program will include a live panel discussion honoring the accomplishments of Edwin Howard Armstrong. See <http://www.wa2xmn.ar88.net/> for details.

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*Al Klase - N3FRQ

WA2XMN IT Department

Flemington, NJ

<http://www.skywaves.ar88.net/>*

The next issue of the VWOA Email Newsletter will continue with another story from **VWOA Member William B. Devoe AA3YR** as he tells us about Diaries kept by him while on World War II Voyages in Liberty Ships and now has them told as stories to entertain his Grand Children.

Joyce Kilmer - NYC - Archangel - Balto. 4
War Time Voyage Number Four -

2/28/44 - 6/6/44 (Bill Devoe) New York to
Archangel to Baltimore

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:

VWOA

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