

# VWOA NEWSLETTER

Email Issue #25

2007



The **2007 VWOA AWARDS LUNCHEON** is planned for **Saturday, June 16, 2007** at the Top Deck of the Seamen's Church Institute in Manhattan.

This will be our 82<sup>nd</sup> Annual Banquet. Make sure you mark your own Appointment Calendar to put aside this date and make a Resolution and Reservation to attend.

Meet and greet some New and Old Friends at the Reception which starts at 1300 Hours.

**Robert C. Marzen, Jr., chosen by the Board as a VWOA Director for 2007**

The VWOA Board of Directors appointed Robert C. Marzen, Jr. K3PWR as a VWOA Director for 2007 filling the vacancy left by Norman B. Mills who resigned after providing many years of Service to VWOA.

THE VWOA NEWSLETTERS ARE EXCELLENT..... I ENJOY ALL OF THEM ..... AND THE PDF FORMAT IS GREAT FOR PRINTING AND SAVING..... I KEEP THEM IN A BINDER AND VALUE THEM..... KEEP THEM COMING..... THANKS TO EVERYONE FOR THEIR EFFORTS.....AND THE RESULTS... BELOW IS PHOTO OF ONE OF MY OLD NAVY SHIPS DURING KOREAN WAR....USS WILTSIE DD716 COMDESRON 11..... WAS IN WONSAN HARBOR NORTH KOREA WHEN ARMISTICE WAS SIGNED...I WAS CW OP ABOARD...

REGARDS ,

**ALBERT D. SPAIN N1NM**



**USS WILTSIE DD716**



## Life at Sea by Herbert Holzberg PhD

Merchant Marine Here I Come!

The Draft Board was beckoning  
I really didn't want to go,  
But they heard my story  
And wouldn't let me say no!

I was destined for Khaki,  
But I was really nervous—  
So I had to make a choice  
The U.S. Maritime Service!

I signed up quickly  
There was no time to waste;  
An infantry position  
Was not to my taste.

Two years went by  
Many adventures were had;  
And as I reminisce,  
I'm just a little sad...

So I'll tell you my story  
If you give me a chance,  
On a few of the happenings  
I may try to enhance!

But I'll try to remember  
Each and every detail,  
And hope that my memory  
Doesn't start to fail!

It started one day  
On August 11, 1944  
When I closed the latch  
On my Bronx front door...

## VWOA Director Herbert Holzberg PhD



## Radio Officer Herbert Holzberg

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The yellow school bus took forever, or so it seemed. Upon arriving at Sheepshead Bay with my future training class, we encountered the usual fun-loving veterans of this base (they had been there all of three days), warning us of the evil that awaits us in camp. Not a relaxing entry into our future home but par for the course. Orientation, uniforms, meals and the start of a minimum six-week boot camp had started. The very next day, Sunday, when we had a few hours of free time, I was completely homesick. After all, I was at least fifty miles from home and trapped into an uncertain environment. When 5 AM arrived on Monday, we started boot camp in earnest and were too busy to be homesick or suffer from any other kind of illness. Still, I had no idea of where this training would lead. It wasn't too long however, for the nefarious options to appear! Those foolhardy souls that couldn't wait to go out to sea, signed up as a messman. Why go as a "messman"? Please excuse the expression. I could hardly say that distasteful word. You would be trained for six-weeks and then would leave for sea. As a messman on ship, you cleaned the dining room, served all the meals and then cleaned up once again. You did these exercises three times daily, seven-days a week while signed on a ship. The work sounded tedious, dirty and what's more, there was no tipping!

Next, oh, there were other alternatives to select. The very next one that came along was to set sail as an Ordinary Seaman. I made a few inquiries and found out that it was not to

my liking at all. Ordinary is a great description of that position. You were on deck outside in all weather chipping paint, painting and freezing in the North Atlantic. I surely thought my expertise could be used to better advantage. My next possibility was to embark on my maritime career as a "Wiper" in the engine room. What do you suppose a "Wiper" does in his daily tasks? You guessed it! He wanders around the engine room of the ship with a rag wiping up spilt oil which is constantly being poured on by the "Oiler", in his effort to lubricate the engines moving parts. I should also mention that the temperature in this deluxe compartment of the ship reaches 130 degrees F. I hope you won't think that I was behaving unreasonably but these entry level openings aboard ship somehow didn't seem to fit into my life style at that time. Now either of these last two positions required eight-weeks of training in order for you to qualify and receive your seaman papers.

It was at this time when my spirits were at a low ebb that I hit what I thought was the proverbial jackpot! They had a thirteen-week Cook & Baker school at Sheepshead Bay. Suddenly, my spirits were lifted. This job skill had a lot of things going for it compared with the other alternatives that I had. You would work under comfortable conditions on ship and I always enjoyed using my culinary skills at home. Salami and eggs with hash brown potatoes were my *epic piece de resistance*. Another advantage was that you would always have a choice of the best foods to eat and

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lastly it was tradition. You see, my father was an Army cook before, during and after World War I. His skills must have been passed on to me! This surely was the way to go for me, I found my niche!

The fickle finger of fate sometimes rears its head unexpectedly as was my case just before I elected to make my final selection for the Cook & Bakers School. A rumor was floating by one day that the U.S. Merchant Marine had an urgent need for Radio Operators aboard ship and they had two schools to train them. One was on Gallups Island in Boston Harbor and the other one on Hoffman Island in New York Bay. You did have to take a few exams in Morse code and mathematics to qualify which did not present any problem for me. In fact, I had taken some code and math classes at RCA Institutes in the Engineering Program that I was following just prior to entering the Service. I immediately dropped the proposed kitchen duties being contemplated, took the entrance tests and applied for Radio Operator training duty on Hoffman Island. Here for the first time an exciting follow-up of my civilian career was possible and I was delighted!

It was a cold, blustery day in January 1945 when I left for Hoffman Island with nineteen other inmates. We took a ferry to Staten Island and a smaller one to Hoffman Island. This man made island was located at the very entrance of New York Bay and presented an eerie feeling seeing the submarine nets attached to one end with the

other end of the net fastened to South Beach on Staten Island; Just a friendly reminder that we were vulnerable to submarine attacks even before we climbed aboard ship. Each week another volunteer group arrived at this base looking forward to one week of KP and other necessary duties followed by the six-month Radio Curriculum. The classes usually included four-hours of code studies every morning, followed by an afternoon of Radio Classes and other necessary studies. We soon settled into the normal routine of the island looking forward each weekend for our escape to the mainland, New York City. Oh, I forgot to mention there was a “catch” to this enticing liberty each week. You were definitely required to pass a code and typing class exam each Friday in order to earn your weekend pass. Also, the code and typing speeds progressively became faster each week. Friday was the shock day that determined whether you would be free or detained on the island for the weekend! I should mention that if you failed to pass either exam, you could look forwards to studying code for an additional four hours on Saturday and Sunday with some other ugly duties to perform depending upon the needs of the Service. You can imagine the tension we all felt when taking each particular exam especially if you had an exciting weekend planned. The culmination of all this effort was the FCC examination taken after the Radio Course was completed to secure your license. The Radio Telegraph license was the coveted

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passport needed to sail as a Radio Officer, Warrant grade in the Merchant Marine.

Somehow, I withstood all the turmoil and trials of Hoffman Island except for the "Clorox Incident". You see there was no maid service on Hoffman Island and we all had to wash our own clothes. I purchased a bottle of Clorox to assist in this endeavor. I won't tell you how I washed my clothes and towels. You would probably laugh, as a scrub brush was our only tool. One day I left a partial empty bottle of Clorox stored in the bottom of my metal clothes lockers along with my naval officer's overcoat. The following weekend in my rush to catch the departing ferry from Hoffman Island, I grabbed my coat and noticed that the Clorox fumes had encouraged three round holes on the right side at the bottom of my overcoat. Unfortunately, we still had to stand inspection by Captain Manning before boarding our vessel for a weekend of freedom. I decided that I had no alternative but to take a chance and hope that his trained eyes would miss the newly arrived openings in my trench coat. Alas, that was not going to happen! He already had passed me and I had taken a deep breath when he backed up and strongly pointed out my deficiency. Surprise was the order of the day for me but I had to find another coat immediately to wear or miss the ferry that was about to depart. Luckily, one of our classmates did not like his overcoat and was preparing to wear his sailor suit into New York City. He handed me his coat and I ran all the way back to the ferry and literally had to

jump aboard as it left our dock That bottle of Clorox was never used again and my coat was rewoven to cover the damage. Time does pass by quicker than you realize when you're having fun! Endless exams in Radio Theory, Morse Code, typewriting and finally one week of secret Naval Convoy instructions. As it must to all people, a day that you are dreading does eventually come forward and happen. We were brought into New York City to the ominous FCC building at 641 Washington Street. We of course had heard about this building, the FCC examination, the Radio inspectors and the anxiety that prevails when you are involved personally to do or die. We now had to take the code and theory examination to prove our worth. We had to take the Radio Telegraph Examination in all of its parts without any preference, like any other civilian. Five hours later and after much anguish and foreboding, we were congratulating each other that passed. Not everyone in our class was that fortunate and quite a few received temporary licenses because of the emergency existing. We were mostly however, a happy bunch of fellows who had lived through an ordeal for six-months and had conquered all of our fears. When we returned to Hoffman Island, our class 34R did graduate and left for our well trained entry into active duty with the U.S. Merchant Marine.

We did have a lottery of sorts to determine who would sail out of New York as there were only a limited number of openings that particular week. Once and while you get

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lucky, I drew the proper straw to leave the “Big Apple” by ship. Most of our class left from the Gulf Ports or West Coast to seek their fortune. The War Shipping Administration was running the whole show at that time and each of us was sent in different direction to join their first vessel. My assignment was to the Radio Officers Union at 1440 Broadway in New York City to accept my first maritime position. All of 18 years old and “green around the gills”, having never been on a ship, I timidly entered the Union Office and was offered a ship from the United Fruit Company. A liberty ship, the David S. Terry, grossing 6000 tons was being loaded to depart for Calcutta, India. I was not too thrilled about going all the way to India as I envisioned a twelve-month trip. Fred Howe, the Union President assured me that it would only take five-months and convinced me that our cargo would be some sort of bananas, I accepted. How wrong I was!!!

I traveled by first class coach train to Baltimore, Maryland to join the ship that was being loaded at Sparrows Point, about six miles out of Baltimore. When I arrived at the shipyard, I was invited to sit down in a jeep with four Military Police all intimidating bruisers in the six foot range that overshadowed me completely. As we approached the ship the vessels winches were efficiently humming and loading each of the five hatches on the liberty ship. Somehow, the cargo being loaded did not look like the banana stalks I anticipated and was promised. I had never seen real bombs before except in the movies, and these

were an exact replica of the celluloid models, fins and all! It didn’t take long to confirm that we were going to carry 2,000 lb bombs in all five hatches along with the deck cargo that consisted of a locomotive and trucks. The weight of the cargo would slow our ship down to about five knots an hour. The die was cast and it was too late to retreat from this munitions ship that I had drawn as my first assignment. Playing it too safe, hadn’t worked at all!

I learned later on that all shipping companies were assigned to the War Shipping Administration and carried a cargo of whatever was selected for them. Three days later, amidst the distorted canned music of the P.A. system, playing a John Sousa military march, we slowly left the dock. We steamed out into Chesapeake Bay with our flag flying, a three-inch gun on the Bow and a five-inch gun on the Stern ready to join our convoy. This is what we had prepared for at Hoffman Island which included the last week of secret Naval Instructions on how to code, decode and operate in a convoy of ships. We did have an eleven-man group of Navy personnel on ship to take charge of the guns in an emergency along with our forty-man crew. This was not too assuring for me as it took twenty-two men to man the guns and our inexperienced crew would have to take up the slack. We did have a lesson in electronic target firing at planes as part of our Hoffman Island curriculum, but I remember that I was not eminently successful in downing any of the planes no matter how

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hard I tried. This certainly did not reinforce my confidence.

I was sharing a cabin next to the Radio Room with the Assistant third Engineer who was quite a likable fellow when he was sober! One night several months later, his love for the bottle led him to dispose of his clothes out of the porthole instead of the wardrobe. When he woke up the next morning, his clothes were fifty miles astern never to meet him again.

Twenty-four hours after we left Baltimore, I noticed that we were proceeding directly across the Atlantic. Puzzled why we did not join a Convoy, I anticipated that we would during the second day. Forty-eight hours after departing from Baltimore, we were still heading on the planned course directly across the Atlantic. I quickly buttonholed the Chief Mate, a man of thirty years experience at sea, and asked him when do we join the Convoy? He looked at me quizzically for a moment and inquired whether I knew something he didn't know. I assured him that hardly could be the case! I soon found out that we were too dangerous for a convoy and were proceeding on our own for a six-week voyage to Calcutta at the magnificent speed of five knots an hour. Exactly six-weeks later we steamed up the mighty and muddy Gandhi River until we reached the harbor at Calcutta. The native longshoremen in their usual white saris, cut the bailing wire and helped unload our ship in five days with the help of the ships winches. One by one each 2,000 lb bomb was unloaded and then rolled individually into an airplane

hanger about 200 feet from our ship. We then had five glorious days in Calcutta to relax. The city amazed me with the hotels and stores on the main street while poverty existed just a few blocks away with entire families sleeping on the street!

In the Bronx, New York, Trolley's had been replaced with busses, another sign of modern times. To my utter amazement, when looking for transportation into the heart of the city, there were the same trolley cars I used to ride in the Bronx. They hadn't even bothered to change the names appearing on the Trolley's face plate. I took my former neighborhood, Southern Boulevard trolley into the heart of Calcutta that evening. It gave me goose bumps when I reflected on that coincidence. The only difference was that I paid in "rupees" rather than a buffalo U.S. nickel.

Calcutta itself was a complex metropolitan city with modern hotels, movie theatres, restaurants, jewelry stores and other luxuries for the well-endowed. However, two blocks away, their sacred cows walked the streets unattended. Complete families with up to twenty-five people slept together on the street. On the street there was a barber cutting his customers hair while both sat on the sidewalk. It was obvious that a tremendous contrast of wealth and poverty existed side by side in this extraordinary city.

Calcutta itself is a never-to-be-forgotten image deeply planted forever in my mind. It was my first foreign port. Yes, civilization did

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exist on the other side of the world to some degree even in 1945. A learning experience, yes! People are people and have to circumvent their trials and tribulations everyday without regard to their geographical location in the World. From the time we entered the muddy banks of the Gandhi River approaching the city till five days later when we departed, Calcutta, an awe of disbelief clouded my subconscious mind. It was a city of mystery right out of Alfred Hitchcock movies from the rickshaws constantly on the move to the Castle commandeered by the U.S. Officers and Civilians stationed there in Service.

Calcutta was truly a city standing still in the time of WWII. The whole world was waiting for peace as the big one, our second world war was waning and about to end. The area was ripe with rumors that peace was pending! I was at the Officers Club one night and the rumor circulated that the magic time had finally arrived and an armistice had been signed. Enough Champagne was depleted that night to float the Queen Mary! However, it was just that, a rumor! The World would see peace soon, but it did not happen during my five days in India.

As we unloaded all of our two thousand pound bomb cargo in Calcutta upon arrival, the SS David S. Terry took on ballast (water to weigh the ship down). We then headed south to Laurengo Marques, Portuguese East Africa to pick up cargo. The name of the area has since been changed, but the town was on the Indian Ocean, Southeast Africa about 300

miles north of Cape Town. The new name of the town is Maputo, and it can be found in the southern end of Mozambique. I would have to admit being a little nervous as the thought of all those lions and tigers stalking around when I debarked there, but my fears were unfounded. In fact, everyone on board the ship was in a joyous frame of mind as the long awaited peace had finally arrived when we were two-days out of Laurengo Marques.

When we arrived in port on a beautiful sunny day, to my amazement, we saw magnificent buildings. They were streamlined private houses, more sophisticated than any I had seen in the Bronx, New York. Right in the center of town, a beautiful movie cinema was showing films that were just released and hadn't even reached New York City. Bars, yes they had them along the waterfront like any other shore side area where big ships docked. We had dropped the hook (anchor), on a very holy day. It was the eve of Rosh Hashanah and the other two Jewish members of the crew as well as yours truly felt guilty and didn't want to ignore the holiday. To the rescue came our Ships Agent who also celebrated the holiday and invited us to join his family for this sacred time of year. We, of course, accepted and were wine and dined and made part of his household for the entire time we were in port. My two landsmen (countrymen) from our ship, and I hired a taxi looking for an alleged Synagogue in Laurengo Marques that night, but unfortunately, never found the building. The town was a small utopia, but like all good

things, we loaded our cargo of coal and left port for Bari, Italy.

We did have a scare of sorts on our way north. The Chief engineer was doing some domestic ironing in his cabin and forgot to turn his iron off. Several gallons of water and two fire extinguishers were required to get everything under control. A fire is not exactly what I had looked forward to with a cargo of coal particularly, but those are the hazards of the trade.

**END OF FIRST INSTALLMENT OF**

Life at Sea by Herbert Holzberg PhD

**VWOA MEMBER NEWS**

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We at VWOA want to thank you for your favorable responses to your VWOA Email Newsletter.

We can only continue this form of Celebrating the Past if all of our VWOA Members make known some of their personal special events that contributed to their career in Wireless.

We want to hear from YOU. Dig into your memories and share them with the rest of your VWOA Members.

**WENDELL'S NEWS CORNER**

Wendell R. Benson brings to your attention a URL: [www.liwhs.org](http://www.liwhs.org)

After you arrive at the site, in the center you will note they are advertising a new article by **VWOA Member George Flanagan** on Telefunken at Sayville.

Scroll down the left PANE to Telefunken and click article entitled "Telefunken at Sayville"

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After having lost track of one of our Email Members, **Clifford A. Bruce**, I finally found him in Assisted Living and received the following update from him:

First Licensed W6GOI June 1932, Hemet, CA then SU1US Cairo, 1947 W2EVT 1949, Hicksville, NY K7HAO Phoenix, AZ 1959 W7ER Scottsdale, AZ 1976` Now W7ER back in Hemet, CA. 2004 72 years of active Ham Radio Operating.

Now reduced to a 2mtr/440 Yaesu FT-60R.

Who says you can't have fun at 90. Cliff, W7ER.

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A URL error was made in one of the links recommended in my column, in the last Newsletter taken directly from the Internet.

The correct URL for **THE RMS TITANIC RADIO PAGE** should have been listed as:

[www.hf.ro/](http://www.hf.ro/)

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Dixon Greenwood KA8RAM

Really enjoy reading about "real" radio ops and how they got started.

I got started with Morse Code while in the Boy Scouts. One of the requirements was Signalling. I hated flags so my buddy and I set out to learn code.

When I went into the Army in early 1941, I was selected to be one of 19 Chief Radio Operator's on the newly built U.S. Army Mine Planters. The Mine Planter Service was attached to various Coast Artillery Divisions. I first served on a training ship (WJBA) and then the new ship (WYPJ). Did this for 5 yrs.

Have been a ham (KA8RAM) for some years. Again txn for great newsletter. I know I couldn't hold a candle to these gents. Clay did a great service to radio telegraph.

73 Dick KA8RAM

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:

Or [ftcassidy@optonline.net](mailto:ftcassidy@optonline.net)  
[wenben@nyc.rr.com](mailto:wenben@nyc.rr.com)

but if you must, send mail to:

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